

UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

**KEEPING INDIGENOUS NIGERIAN
LANGUAGES ALIVE: THE JOURNEY SO FAR**

An Inaugural Lecture

By

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ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

- 2.45 P.M. GUESTS ARE SEATED
3.00 P.M. ACADEMIC PROCESSION BEGINS

The procession shall enter the CBN Centre of Excellence Auditorium, University Park, and the Congregation shall stand as the procession enters the hall in the following order:

Academic Officer

Professors

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Dean, School of Graduate Studies

Provost, College of Health Sciences

Lecturer

Registrar

Deputy Vice Chancellor [Research & Development]

Deputy Vice Chancellor [Academic]

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Vice Chancellor

After the Vice Chancellor has ascended the dais, the Congregation shall remain standing for the University of Port Harcourt Anthem.

The Congregation shall thereafter resume their seats.

THE VICE CHANCELLOR'S OPENING REMARKS.

The Registrar shall rise, cap, invite the Vice Chancellor to make his opening remarks and introduce the Lecturer.

The Lecturer shall remain standing during the Introduction.

THE INAUGURAL LECTURE

The Lecturer shall step on the rostrum, cap and deliver her Inaugural Lecture. After the lecture, she shall step towards the Vice Chancellor and resume her seat. The Vice Chancellor shall present the document to the Registrar.

CLOSING

The Registrar shall rise, cap and invite the Vice Chancellor to make his Closing Remarks.

The Vice Chancellor's Closing Remarks.

The Vice Chancellor shall then rise cap and make his Closing Remarks. The Congregation shall rise for the University of Port Harcourt Anthem and remain standing as the Academic [Honour] Procession retreats in the following order:

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Deputy Vice Chancellor [Administration]

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Registrar

Lecturer

Provost, College of Health Sciences

Dean, School of Graduate Studies

Deans of Faculties/School

Professors

Academic Officer

DEDICATION

This Inaugural Lecture is dedicated to the Almighty God, the source of Wisdom, Knowledge and Understanding, the one in whom I live, move and have my being.

To Him, be the glory!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Vice Chancellor Sir, permit me to use this opportunity to appreciate people who contributed, in one way or another, to the contented, fulfilled Lady I am today, standing tall before this great and distinguished assembly, to deliver my Inaugural Lecture. Let me quickly appreciate the Vice Chancellor, Professor Owunari Abraham Georgewill, his Management team – DVCs, Registrar, Bursar, and Librarian – for the opportunity to present this Inaugural Lecture, and the University of Port Harcourt for employing me thirty-four years ago and providing the necessary environment for my growth and progress in the university system.

My gratitude goes to my parents, both of blessed memory, Mr. Michael Oriane Alli and Mrs. Anna Arohu Alli who believed so much in girl-child education. Growing up, I was never under any pressure and frankly, I did not understand what education was about but always excelled because the result made my parents, especially my father, very happy. My father as a teacher, headmaster and Education Officer at various points in his career ensured that I lacked nothing, ably supported by my mother, who by dint of hard work was able to combine raising children (six of us, apart from relatives) with attendance at Secretarial Training School, Benin City, retiring as a Personal Secretary in the Civil Service.

I also wish to thank my teachers who prepared me academically and otherwise for the future. One of my Primary school teachers, Mrs Ojo whom I met years later when she became my student in the Sandwich Programme in the University of Port Harcourt in the 1990s, was always proud to

tell her classmates that she was my teacher in the then Marian Girls School, Benin City.

I thank my teachers in the Secondary School. My academic journey will not be complete without me paying a special tribute to my alma mater, the famous St. Maria Goretti Girls Grammar School, Benin City and the then Principal, Revd. Sister Henrietta Powers, of blessed memory, along with other Revd. Sisters and teachers. They, especially Sister Henrietta, made sure the girls had quality education, well rounded in character and learning, ensuring that we turned out to be as useful and productive as we are today. I remember how we met after my Secondary school education after Evening Mass at St. Joseph Catholic Church, Benin City in 1973. I had proudly announced to her that I was now a Clerk, a whole 'Dispatch Clerk' in the Public Service Commission, Benin City. Instead of admiration, she was agitated and burst out saying 'Miss Philomena R-Alli, I am very disappointed in you!'. That day, I went home feeling dejected and determined to 'aim higher'. You see, I was very close to the Revd. Sisters. My father was a teacher in my school and at some point, they had sought his permission to allow me join them in the Cloistered life but my parents had refused on the ground that I was their only daughter though I only got to know later.

Vice Chancellor Sir, my academic history will also not be complete if I fail to mention my sojourn (1975-79) at the University of Ife, Ile Ife, Osun State, now Obafemi Awolowo University. I appreciate my lecturers who grilled and taught us to ask questions critically and made sure we knew and defended our rights. I salute in particular my lecturer Professor Adebisi Afolayan, who celebrated his 98th year this year. He

was a caring father to his students. I remember the occasion he invited us to his Campus accommodation and we were served palm oil *akara* by his wife. A true, and proudly Nigerian. He was wearing Yoruba outfits to lecture back in those days. I can't remember him ever wearing suits. He was a classmate of Professor Neil Smith who became my supervisor in my postgraduate studies in England. At Ife, I blossomed academically and otherwise, in the process, receiving the National Merit Award, a scholarship reserved for the best six students in the Faculty of Arts. On the social front, a group of us, students, formed Skala Club of which I was the founding Vice President (1977-79) to the founding President, Austin Izagbo. We were the first to organize a Beauty Contest in any Nigerian University, and it was a huge success. Let me quickly add that my spiritual life was also not in any way negatively affected as I was Vice President of the Legion of Mary during the same period (1977-79) and I graduated in 1979, with Second Class Honours (Upper Division).

For my Postgraduate studies abroad (1980-86), I acknowledge my lecturers and mentors in the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, University College London - Professors Neil V. Smith, Deidre Wilson, A.C Gimson, John C. Wells, Richard Hudson and Michael Ashby and in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)- Professors Ruth Kempson and Geoff Horrocks. I wish to pay special tribute to my Supervisor Professor Neil V. Smith (of blessed memory) who convinced me to study Linguistics instead of English Grammar. He wrote *A grammar of Nupe* and encouraged me to work on Esan, my language, as there were no written materials on it. He was God-sent, always

encouraging me and appreciating my work and explaining how the University system worked, making it possible for me to complete my doctoral programme in good time (1982-86), in spite of having three babies during the period of study. Talk of multi-tasking!

My deepest regard is reserved for my family, especially my loving husband of forty-six years (since 2nd September,1978), my best friend, my gist and travel partner with whom I have traversed many countries and shared the vicissitudes of life, my Noble Brother, Sir Professor Oseikhuemen Adebayo Ejele (KSJI), a retired but not tired Professor of Haematology and Blood Transfusion who in his retirement is still producing Consultants. As at the last count, he has produced forty-seven, twelve of whom are Professors, and still counting. He is currently the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Mudiame University, Irrua, Edo State. He has also been a wonderful father to our surviving four biological children, and social children to whom our doors were always open. Just like my parents and brothers, he and our children encouraged and supported me all the way, to achieve my goals, to soar to heights uncommon for a girl-child as this year marks my nineteenth year of professing.

I appreciate my children and their spouses - Engr. Akomen Ehimare and Dr. Ejemen Ejele (nee Ibhawo), Dr. Irabor Osezua and Dr. Jennifer Ejele (nee Obeto), Mr. Vincent Damian and Dr Ilobekemen Enivie Akioyamen (nee Ejele) – My one and only son-in-law and only daughter, Mr. Ogbeide Aidenomo Ejele - our last born, and all our grandchildren.

I am grateful to members of my immediate and extended family, my brothers Mr. John Alli, Dr. Gabriel Alli, Dr.

Thaddeus Alli and Engr. Valentine Alli; my uncles Mr. Matthias Obaitua Alli, Mr. Tony Alli, Revd. Fr. Dr. Peter Alli, Mr. Mike Sawyer and other family members- Rose Alli, Aunty Beatrice, Iyabo, Christie, Maggi and Rose Aiyauhomon. My in-laws – the Agbator family (especially David & Taiye, Emma & Eniye, Deborah) and Ejele family, especially Mr. Paul Ejele and his family.

Permit me, Sir, to pay tribute to my dear ones who have gone to be with the Lord too soon. I remember our first son, Mr. Imomion Emmanuel Ejele, a Lawyer (2/09/2009), my eldest brother Engr. Dr. Christopher Mike Alli (11/07/2019) and my first cousin Dr. Itua Obaitua (03/01/2020), Professor Folorunsho Ambrose Alli, former Governor of Bendel State, and uncle Stephen Alli. They are sorely missed. Even though they are gone, they are not forgotten. May their souls continue to rest in perfect peace, amen.

I appreciate my colleagues and students in the Faculty of Humanities, especially in the Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies. I have enjoyed working with them all, from the old staff to the young ones some of whom were my students and are now my colleagues. I remember late Professor Kay Williamson ‘Mama Kay’, Professor Shirley Yul-Ifode (now retired), Professor Virginia Onumajuru and Dr. Jenewari, both also retired. I appreciate Professor Ozo-Mekuri Ndimele with whom I have worked for about thirty-four years, Professors Kari, Isaac, Alerechi, Oweleke, Associate Professors Ayuwo and Eze, Drs. Ejeba, Eunice Osuagwu, Titi Osuagwu, Joshua, and other lecturers and administrative staff of the department over the years. I have enjoyed the comraderie and team spirit guiding work ethics in the

department. I must not forget to thank the staff of the new Faculty of Communication and Media Studies who were part and parcel of the LCS Department/family until recently when they left to form a new Faculty. I enjoyed working with you all. Life is about moving up, making progress and making use of opportunities that come one's way. Make a success of it. Best wishes always.

I recall with fondness and gratitude the role played by the 8th Vice Chancellor of University of Port Harcourt, Professor Joseph Atubokiki Ajenka, in sending me on Secondment to Federal University Otuoke (FUO) immediately after my Sabbatical Leave. This step allowed me to assist in stabilizing the new university. I also recall the back-and-forth mails between him, the Registrar and other FUO counterparts before finally allowing me to continue with them. I must say a lot was achieved during this period. Thank you 'my birthday mate!'

Finally, last but not the least, I thank the Priests and members of the Chapel of the Annunciation Catholic Chaplaincy of the university who have provided spiritual succour and sustenance over these years. I am indeed grateful to all, those I have mentioned and all those time and space will not allow me to mention. May God reward you all, amen.

PREAMBLE

The Vice Chancellor Sir, permit me to give some relevant information before I commence this Inaugural Lecture. It is interesting how I ended up as a Linguist. While growing up, I never heard of Linguistics. A series of events led me down this path. I was never under any pressure to study any course. In my Secondary school, I was good in both arts and science subjects. However, I fell ill in my final year and had to go home; returning to school just to take the West African School Certificate examination. I was advised to defer the examination but opted to do it and ended up with Grade 2, with aggregate 24 in 1971.

After my School Certificate, I went on to do Higher School Certificate (HSC) in Government College Ughelli (GCU) in 1972, studying Physics, Chemistry and Biology. I was among the sets that the Federal Government ‘experimented’ with, sending girls to an all-male School, using Edo College in Benin City, with the girls boarding in Idia College, and GCU, with the girls boarding in Anglican Girls Grammar School, Ughelli. I was sent to GCU and we commuted every day to GCU. I toyed with the idea of studying medicine but could not stand dissecting the beautiful white rabbit that was killed; I could neither stand the sight of blood nor ‘play with spit’ in test tubes, so I did not partake in the experiments. I also could not stand the smell of medicines, not to talk of poo and vomit, even till today. As for Physics, I could not understand why I had to make two opposite pins align. At the end, I passed only biology. After HSC, I worked for two years (1973-75) where I met dashing, young

Administrative Officers who had studied Classics and were doing very well in the Civil Service. As for me, I was happy with myself as a Dispatch Clerk, until that incident of meeting my secondary school Principal, Sister Henrietta Power.

I applied to and was admitted to read English Studies at the then University of Ife, Ile-Ife in 1975. To me, this was a 'safe' course where I would not have to face what I saw then, naively, as challenges. I have always been interested in expressions and their use in language and how two people could say the same thing and mean different things and express the same thing in different ways depending on the context. While studying English, we were taught some linguistics courses and after the undergraduate programme, I sustained the interest by following up in my postgraduate studies. One difference I found in studying linguistics, one had to know the rules so if a sentence was ungrammatical, one had to explain why, what rules were violated, find motivation/justification for whatever position one held. This was different from just knowing that a sentence is wrong and just being given the 'correct' version. Whatever position held in any argument, one must provide reasons or justification and I continue to apply this principle till date in any situation I face.

On gaining admission into UCL, University of London for postgraduate studies, the then Head of Department, Professor Neil Smith, advised me to study linguistics even though I had applied to study English. He further encouraged me to blaze the trail, working on a Nigerian language that had not been studied. This was a challenge to me personally because I felt unhappy that in my search for information in the SOAS and UCL libraries, I found only one sentence that

referred to Esan as ‘one of the Edo-speaking peoples of West Africa’ (John Spencer 1971). This was truly challenging because I was not even a fluent speaker as I was raised in Western Nigeria and I could speak better Yoruba than Esan. I have always loved challenges so I picked up the gauntlet. I started with the PGD programme in 1981, completed M.A. in 1982 and Ph.D. in 1986. I had the privilege of having both my M.A. dissertation *Towards a Phonology of Esan* and Ph.D. thesis *Transitivity, Tense and Aspect in Esan* supervised by Professor Smith. Interestingly, my M.A. dissertation, which established the phonemes or distinctive speech sounds of Esan provided the basis of the alphabet that formed the foundation of the Esan orthography. My research work, which started with my Masters dissertation and Doctoral thesis, served as trail blazers, and set the tone for my future research works. Both research works are now reference materials on the Esan language, which was first documented in these important academic works.

I am truly grateful to Professor Smith as he made my stay at the UCL memorable, ever ready to see me and offer assistance. There were times the workload seemed overwhelming (yes because I was combining studies and running my home/raising a family) and I would in my heart say I have tried, let me go and finish my studies in Nigeria. However, a visit to him each time ended up re-energizing and encouraging me to finish the programme, which I did in 1986.

I was recruited as Lecturer II from UK by the University of Benin after my postgraduate studies in 1986, and on returning to Nigeria, I worked there for two years, moved to University of Calabar and worked for another two years and

finally settled here at the University of Port Harcourt in 1990, till date. My research over the years covers formal linguistic issues across phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, using data essentially from the Esan language, and communication, pragmatics and discourse analysis as aspects of meaning beyond sentence meaning.

My enduring quest for knowledge this time, about meaning in general, has taken me beyond semantics, Interface relations between Language, Style and Communication into Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis and has culminated in the publication of my latest book entitled *The Study of Meaning: Sentence Meaning Beyond Linguistic Semantics* (Ejele, (2024) <https://www.amazon.com/dp/BODJ6BCRDC>) and another book entitled *Perspectives in Semantics and Pragmatics* (Ejele (Forthcoming)).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Order of Proceedings -----	iii
The Inaugural Lecture -----	iv
Dedication-----	v
Acknowledgements -----	vi
Preamble -----	xii
Protocol -----	xviii
1. Introduction -----	1
1.1 Indigenous Languages in Nigeria and their Classification -----	2
1.2 Languages in Contact -----	6
1.3 Multilingualism and the Nigerian Situation -----	9
1.3.1 Multilingual States in Nigeria -----	11
1.3.2 Monolingual States in Nigeria -----	13
2.0 Steps Taken to Ensure the Survival of Indigenous Languages and Culture -----	14
2.1 Providing Orthographies and Standardizing Indigenous Languages -----	15
2.1.1 Providing Orthographies of Indigenous Nigerian Languages -----	15
2.1.2 Current Status of Providing Orthographies for Indigenous Nigerian Languages -----	17
2.2 Corpus Planning -----	19
2.3 Language Planning -----	23
2.4 Language Documentation -----	25
2.5 Speakers' Contribution to Keeping their Languages and Culture Alive -----	27
2.5.1 Keeping our Indigenous Languages Alive -----	27

2.5.2	Keeping our Culture Alive -----	30
3.0	Current Status of Indigenous Languages in Nigeria ----	32
3.1	Extinct Languages and Endangered Languages -----	32
3.1.1	List of Extinct Languages -----	33
3.1.2	List of Endangered Languages -----	34
4.0	Challenges and Prospects of Keeping Indigenous Languages Alive-----	37
4.1	Challenges -----	37
4.2	Prospects -----	39
5.0	Recommendations -----	42
	Short, Medium and Long terms -----	42
6.0	Concluding Remarks -----	45
	REFERENCES -----	47
	Citation -----	62

PROTOCOL

Vice Chancellor, Sir,
Members of the Governing Council of the University,
Principal Officers of the University,
Provost, College of Health Sciences,
Dean, School of Graduate Studies,
Deans of Faculties and Directors of Centres,
Heads of Departments,
Distinguished Professors,
Staff and Students of the University,
Members of the Press
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. INTRODUCTION

Use your language or lose it (Williamson 1990:127)

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

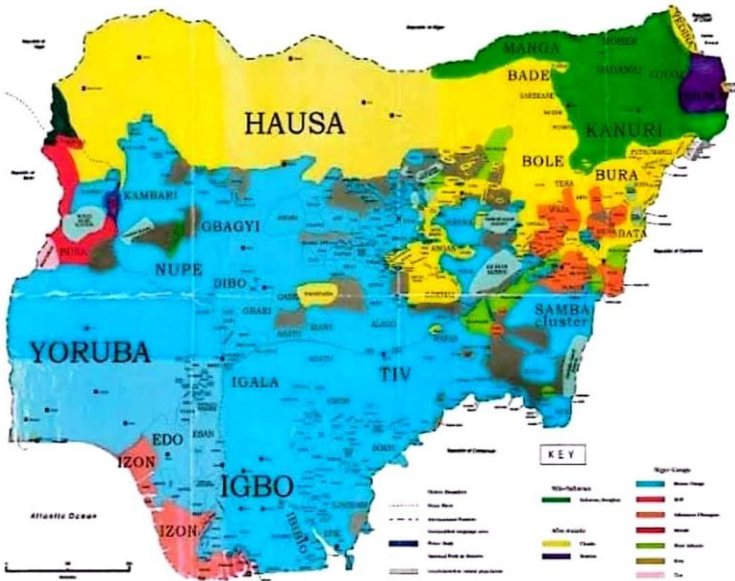
For some time now, many people – linguists, governments and language enthusiasts have not only been interested in but worried about the future of our indigenous languages, especially in the face of so many daunting challenges which seem to operate against the use, survival and thriving of our indigenous languages. The topic of this Inaugural Lecture *Keeping Indigenous Languages in Nigeria Alive: The Journey so far* is one that has bothered me for a long time as a linguist and a native speaker of my language, Esan. From my many informal interactions with linguists and other Nigerians on this issue, many people feel a sense of helplessness, like a rudderless ship being tossed by the wind wherever it chooses. Really, should we give up hope or at least do something about the plight of our languages and culture, instead of ‘giving up without a fight?’ I choose to go along with not giving up but to do something about it. It must be pointed out that governments, linguists and language enthusiasts have done and are still doing things about the precarious language situation in Nigeria. We just cannot afford to give up.

To understand the issues at stake, we need to provide some background information such as knowing some basic facts about the indigenous languages, what happens when languages come in contact and multilingualism so we can have an update on the situation of the journey so far as regards language status and use in Nigeria.

1.1 Indigenous languages in Nigeria and their classification

Nigeria is a complex multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural country, being the most complex in Africa and one of the most complex in the world (Blench 1998:187). The exact number of languages in Nigeria is unknown. Thus, figures given over the years include 394 (Hansford et al 1976), 478 (Grimes 1992), 500 (Crozier and Blench 1992) and recently, 512 (Ethnologue 2017) with the comment that this figure will rise when dialects are considered because many of the languages have dialects. In 2023, the figure quoted was 500 languages (<https://www.statista.com> 2023), and in 2024 the number of native languages was put at 525 (<https://en.wikipedia.org> 2024). Of these languages, only English, the language bequeathed to Nigeria by the colonial masters, is designated official language while the three major languages, namely, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are constitutionally recognized by the 1999 Constitution as national languages spoken predominantly in the North, South East and South West respectively. Some of the minority languages are Efik, Ibibio, Isoko, Edo, Tiv, Fulani, Idoma, Izon, Kamwe, Kanuri, Ukwani, Urhobo, Nupe, Gbagyi.

Fig. 1 Map of Indigenous Languages of Nigeria



Source: Nicholas Idoko March 30, 2023

Classification of the languages has been on different bases such as

- 1) Numerical strength or demography (cf. NPE 1977,1981; Adekunle 1972, Williamson 1990, Brann 1986, 1993, Agheyisi 1986, Garry & Rubino 2001, Essien 2002)
- 2) Numerical strength and development (cf. Williamson 1990, Bamgbose 1992, Emenanjo 1990)
- 3) Power/Dominance and numerical strength (Skutnabb-Kangas 1990).

Consequently, based on **population** of speakers, availability of written materials and status in education, the languages were grouped into **major/majority** and **minor/minority** (Olagoke 1980, 1982). Three of them – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba were taken as major while the rest were taken as minor/minority (see also Williamson 1990, Bamgbose 1992). Hausa is the lingua franca of the North, Igbo of the South East and Yoruba of the West.

Following the uproar and arguments over the division into major/minor, the need to redefine minority languages that had achieved recognition and dominance in their respective states as a result of State creation and to get away from the pejorative term (Agheyisi 1984, Jubril 1990), there was a re-definition of the languages into a tripartite division of **major**, **main** and **small group** languages (Bamgbose 1992:4). The original three major languages retained their label and status while minority languages which had attained recognition and status in their newly created states are regarded as main languages. Examples include Edo (Bini) in Edo State, Urhobo in Delta State, Igala in Kogi, Ibibio in Akwa Ibom, Efik in Cross River, Izon in Bayelsa, Kanuri and Fulfulde in Bornu and Nupe in Niger state (Ejele 2003: 114).

Sometimes, as a result of state creation, languages can have improved status while not being dominant. For instance, the Esan language in Edo State had an improved status now next to Edo (Bini) – a fact observed by Grimes (1992:343) in her description of Esan as ‘a regionally important language used in initial primary education’.

Classification on the basis of **development** treated the major languages as **developed** in terms of having well

established orthographies, standard written varieties, long traditions of writing, large and varied corpora of written literature and dynamic metalanguages (Emenanjo 1990:1). The main languages are considered as **developing**, typically having recent traditions of writing, incipient standard varieties, some amounts of written literature and nascent metalanguages and are used in the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Network News in their respective states. These include Efik, Fulfulde, Tiv, Kanuri, Edo, Izon, Igala, Urhobo and Nupe. The small group languages are treated as **undeveloped**. These languages are characterized by lack of orthographies or standardized orthographies, standard varieties, written literatures and metalanguages. Ejele (2003) makes a case for **underdeveloped languages**. These languages have some form of orthographies, very few written literatures, and are distinct from **undeveloped** languages which have no written literature, no orthography, no metalanguage and very little is known about them. Many Nigerian languages fall into this category, many of which are endangered, being languages with fewer than 500 speakers and therefore face extinction. It is interesting to note that FRCN news in the different states is now cast in more languages beyond the major and main languages, including Esan in Edo, Ikwerre, Ogoni (Kana) and Kalabari in Rivers, Itsekiri in Delta, etc.

Further **update information** on this is that discussions on indigenous Nigerian languages are still largely being done in terms of minor/major languages. The issue of nomenclature is too small to distract scholars and language enthusiasts from the greater threat of language endangerment and possible extinction which all indigenous languages are facing.

Classification of the world's languages was also done in terms of population. In a major work that took seven years to complete, and which involved nearly 200 world renowned scholars in linguistics, Garry and Rubino (2001: xi) treated major languages numerically as 'all languages spoken by two million or more people'. By this criterion, six Nigerian languages – Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Kanuri and Fulfulde qualify as major languages. By implication, any language with a population less than two million is minor and therefore endangered.

As at 2021, Hausa is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria by more than 48 million speakers, followed by Yoruba with 39.5 million, Nigerian Pidgin by 30 million, Igbo by 27 million and Fulfulde by 22 million (<https://www.statista.com>). For this Lecture, what is important is that irrespective of numerical strength, all indigenous Nigerian languages - major, main and small group, are facing the same threats of endangerment and extinction directly or indirectly as a result of language contact; it is only a matter of degree and time if nothing serious is done to stem the tide.

1.2 Languages in Contact

From time immemorial, human beings have always interacted using one language or the other. There are 195 countries in the world with 7139 officially known languages but the number is declining (<https://swaplanguage.com>). Ethnologue Guide gives 7079 as the number of languages spoken in the world while roughly 6909 is quoted by https://www_researchgate_net, so we see the numbers fluctuate. In addition, some of these languages are widely spoken while others are barely thriving or existing.

When languages come in contact, certain things happen. First, what is language contact and how has it affected Nigerian languages?

Language contact is the situation where speakers of different languages interact long enough for features of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar to be transferred from the dominant language to the non-dominant language. Thus, in the case of Nigeria, English is the dominant language as the one and only official language used in transacting government business, diplomacy, education, financial and business transactions and economic empowerment and progress in life while our indigenous languages are at best generally relegated to being used in the family/LGA and so ab initio, cannot compete with English. The same process takes place when dominant indigenous languages such as the major languages, come against the weaker main or small group languages. The language of progression in terms of education, economy, development or survival will always overcome. The process also takes place between a dominant dialect and a less used dialect. Language contact invariably leads to language shift, language change, language endangerment and finally language death or extinction.

Language shift is the beginning of language endangerment because as speakers gradually shift from using their language to using the dominant one, they begin to lose sight of the value of their language. With time, their language is ‘dislodged’ and the speakers stop using it (Adamu 2010:59). Whenever languages, whether small, main or major, are in competition with big dominant languages of wider communication, language shift invariably takes place

irrespective of the degree of language loyalty and pride exhibited by the speakers of the smaller/weaker languages (cf. Emenanjo 2010:10).

Another possible outcome of language contact is **language change** which may follow language shift. This happens when speakers stop using their own language in communication or interaction among themselves but use the dominant language. When language shift becomes stable, language change has taken place. At this point, the language is definitely **endangered**, especially when the parents fail to transmit the language to their children, the next generation. A language is also considered endangered when the number of speakers become too few and the language is no longer in use in any primary domains, such as the family, community gatherings, etc. Finally, when there are no speakers of the language and very little is known about it, the language becomes **extinct** or lost. The classic pattern of language loss takes place across three generations (Murray (2011: 328), viz:

-

- 1) The parents are monolingual.
- 2) Their children become bilingual by adopting a new language.
- 3) Their children's children grow up monolingual in the new language and are unable to speak to their grandparents in their own native tongue.

Other effects of languages in contact include borrowing which can in turn lead to the phenomenon of Code Switching (CS) and Code Mixing (CM).

1.3 Multilingualism and the Nigerian Situation

Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural country having more than 300 ethnic groups with distinct religious and regional differences, being one of the most culturally diverse countries (https://www_wilson.center.org.) Typical of such societies, language use involves choices made by speakers who have communicative competence in a number of languages, when they have to make the choice of which one to use, depending on the situation. Many Nigerians are multilingual, being able to speak at least two languages, namely, their mother tongue (MT) and another. Speakers of these languages communicate among themselves interlingually (as opposed to intralingually) either in Pidgin (and/or English, if educated) or in another native language such as a major one like Yoruba/Igbo/Hausa or a main language (Ejele 2003:120).

Although the presence of many languages may appear to be a disadvantage to growth and development, especially in the quest for a national language as a lingua franca, multilingualism actually makes communication easier as people are forced to learn another language to enable them communicate with others who do not speak their own MT. In fact, multilingualism has turned out to be an asset that aids language choice involving using different languages and their varieties for different purposes.

The past few years have witnessed the rising profile of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) spoken as the lingua franca, especially for unofficial activities, being the dominant language of wider communication in Nigeria. In fact, Grimes (1992:343) observes that 99% of Esan people in Edo State, speak or understand NP. In Delta State, NP is not only dominant but has

creolized or is in the process of creolizing as it has become the first language of monolingual youths in Sapele and Warri areas while older members are bilingual/trilingual in Urhobo, NP and English as observed in Ejele (2003: 123). **Update information** on the use of NP in Nigeria is that it is consolidating its position and functionality all over the country as over 60 million people now speak it (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/> 2024).

Below, we provide two lists showing the status of the 36 states in Nigeria in terms of multilingualism indicating the number of languages attested and monolingualism. Note that the languages listed in tables 1 and 2 respectively under 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 have dialects, a fact we did not reflect.

1.3.1. Multilingual States in Nigeria

Table 1. States and Number of Languages Attested

S/No.	State	Number of Languages
1.	Cross River	73
2.	Adamawa	58
3.	Taraba	54
4.	Benue	50
5.	Delta	49
6.	Bayelsa	47
7.	Enugu	42
8.	Plateau	40+
9.	Kaduna	40
10.	Bauchi	40
11.	Lagos	?39
12.	Niger	38
13.	Nasarawa	29
14.	Rivers	28
15.	Bornu	28
16.	Katsina	23
17.	Gombe	21
18.	Akwa Ibom	20
19.	Edo	17
20.	Kebbi	16
21.	Kogi	16
22.	Yobe	7
23.	Kwara	5
24.	Sokoto	4+
25.	Jigawa	4
26.	Kano	2
27.	Zamfara	3
28.	Abia	2

The list of multilingual states has been arranged in descending order starting with Cross River as the state with the highest number of languages (73) and Abia as one with the lowest number of languages (2). Interesting observations: -

- 1) Out of the 36 states, 28 are multilingual, showing that the language situation in Nigeria indeed is complex.
- 2) Hausa is the predominant language in Kano, closely followed by Fulfulde. There are three other languages spoken in the state (Kainji languages Moro, Kurama and Map in Doguwa LGA).
- 3) Of the five Igbo states, Enugu is multilingual though predominantly Igbo. Minorities of Idoma and Igala are found in Etteh Uno in Igbo Eze North LGA.
- 4) The predominant language in Abia State is Igbo (95% of the people), a small number speak Ibibio.
- 5) In Lagos State, the predominant language is Yoruba. However, given the cosmopolitan nature of the state, there are as many languages as ethnic groups that live and do business there, the highest being Igbo. People generally speak their own language among themselves though many have learnt to also speak Yoruba. However, the most common language of communication interlingually outside official activities is NP.

1.3.2 Monolingual States in Nigeria

Table 2. States Where Only One Language is Spoken

S/No.	State	Number of Languages
1.	Anambra	1 (Igbo)
2.	Ebonyi	1 (Igbo)
3.	Ekiti	1 (Yoruba)
4.	Imo	1 (Igbo)
5.	Ogun	1 (Yoruba)
6.	Ondo	1 (Yoruba)
7.	Osun	1 (Yoruba)
8.	Oyo	1 (Yoruba)

- 1) Only eight States are monolingual and all of them are in Southern Nigeria (South West and South East). None in the North. The use of Hausa language as first or second language gives the false impression of monolingualism in Northern Nigeria but is actually the language of wider communication in the North.
- 2) All the South West States are monolingual in Yoruba, with Lagos having a special status.

This complex linguistic situation ensures that English, our national language, spoken by more than half of Nigeria's population, having an overwhelming international presence, continues to dominate our lives as the official language that is key to personal development, education, economic advancement, diplomacy, technological advancement and digital competence.

2.0. Steps Taken to Ensure the Survival of Indigenous Nigerian Languages and Culture

Vice Chancellor Sir, we present steps taken to keep indigenous Nigerian languages and culture alive and stop or arrest or delay their march to extinction. Government has taken some steps to shore up the languages but it is impossible for government alone to take care of all the languages. Some State Houses of Assembly in States where the three major languages are spoken sometimes use them for the House proceedings. For example, the Yoruba language in Oyo, Ogun, Ekiti, Lagos and Ondo and Hausa in Zamfara, Sokoto, Jigawa, Kebbi, Niger and Kano. The owners of the languages have done and are still doing their bit to keep their languages alive by providing orthographies and also in terms of corpus planning, language planning and language documentation.

It generally involves taking sure and adequate steps to develop the languages. In what follows, we look at steps that government has taken over the years and what the owners of the languages have done and are still doing in the race against time to keep their languages alive first by providing orthographies for the languages and also in terms of corpus planning, language planning and language documentation. Keeping a language alive is an on-going process that must be sustained principally by the owners of the languages, so all hands have to be on deck.

2.1 Providing Orthographies and Standardizing Indigenous Languages

2.1.1 Providing Orthographies of Indigenous Nigerian Languages

One of the most important steps to halt or reduce language extinction is to have it reduced to writing through provision of an orthography, a spelling system or a writing system. While the orthographies of the major languages Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba were written long ago as well as those of the main languages, those of many of the small group languages are yet to be written. The Federal Government set up the National Language Centre, Lagos to provide writing systems for indigenous Nigerian languages in the form of Manuals produced over the years under different editors. The prime objective of publishing manuals in series for standardizing Nigerian languages has been ‘to provide up-dated information and systematic guidelines for writing in these languages’ (Agheyisi 1987: i). Furthermore, it is hoped that the publication of these orthographies will serve to renew efforts and generate greater interest in the development of the languages in written form (Agheyisi 1987: ii). Many more orthographies sponsored by the National Language Centre have been written. The Centre has since been absorbed into the National Educational, Research and Development Council (NERDC) situated in Abuja. The Federal Government actually reached out to linguists to provide orthographies for Nigerian languages. This is how I was invited by the Federal Ministry of Education while studying in England to write the orthography of Esan.

I will illustrate with the Esan language on which I have worked over the years. Esan is spoken in Edo State, Nigeria. By classification, Esan is a North-Central Edoid language which is subsumed under Benue-Congo within the Niger-Congo language family (Elugbe 1986; Bendor-Samuel 1989; Williamson and Blench 2000:18). Thirty-five (35) clans make up the Esan language group, speaking varieties of the Esan language.

The term ESAN refers to the people and their language. This is what the people call themselves and their language but were referred to as 'Ishan' by the British. Presently, the Esan people are found in Edo State, Nigeria, occupying the area covered by five Local Government Areas (LGAs), namely Esan West, Esan Central, Esan North-East, Esan South-East and Igueben with a population of about 500,000 at home but with a strong diasporan population, comes to about 1 million - 1.5 million people (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). The area of land inhabited by the Esan people is 2987.52 sq km and is bounded on the north by Etsako LGA, on the east by the River Niger, on the south by Oshimili, Aniocha and Ika LGAs and on the north and north-west by Owan and Orhionmwan LGAs. The five LGAs geo-politically make up the Edo Central Senatorial district, sandwiched between the Edo South and Edo North Senatorial districts.

What was generally observed is that after the publication of orthographies and the initial excitement and momentum, work on many languages was not sustained, mainly because of funding and sometimes because of the demise of some active members of Language committees (as in the case of Esan).

2.1.2 Current Status of Providing Orthographies for Indigenous Languages

The Orthography (symbols and conventions for writing a language) of Esan, based on my MA thesis was co-authored and published in 1987 (Okojie & Ejele). Over the years, orthographies of more indigenous languages have been published. In Rivers State, the government set up the *Rivers Readers Committee* with Professor Alagoa as Chairman, Professors Kay Williamson and Otonti Nduka as members. They designed and produced orthographies, primers and other pedagogical materials for use in schools in the communities to encourage mother tongue education. This effort went dormant but was revived in 2008 under a new CEO, Mr. Tony Enyia, as *Rivers Readers Project* under Rivers State languages Development. Offiong (2009) lists nine Cross River languages - Ejagam, Bekwara, Lokaa, Mbembe, Yala, Leggbo, Bette, Ishibori, and Mbube that have orthographies developed by linguists. However, for some years now, not much has been seen or heard about the provision of orthographies for indigenous languages. The last Manual on orthographies of Nigerian Languages (*Manual IX*) was edited by Professor Ndimele in 2011. In 2012, orthographies of fourteen Rivers State languages were approved by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Abuja. The fourteen languages are Abuan, Degema, Egbema, Ekpeye, Egene, Echie, Eleme, Gokana, Ibani, Kana, Ndoni, Odual, Ogba and Okrika. So far, 17 out of 28 local languages in Rivers have approved orthographies (Kari 2019:18).

Many departments of Linguistics in Nigerian universities have worked on many of the hitherto relatively

unknown small group indigenous languages, especially those around them and their libraries as repositories, have undergraduate projects and Masters and Doctoral theses/dissertations supervised by linguists. The Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt is a good example, where a good number of lecturers and students have worked on endangered languages. The Bible Translation groups are also working on indigenous languages. **On update information**, it is unfortunate that the total number of indigenous languages with orthographies out of over 500 is not known. Providing orthographies for indigenous languages should be a continuous exercise. Let us see how many languages can be rescued or salvaged.

In addition to the work done by the NERDC in providing orthographies of Nigerian languages to handle affairs of Nigerian language studies, the Federal Government of Nigeria established a National Institute for Nigerian Languages under an Act in 1992 (<https://files.eric.ed.gov>) and in 1993, the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Aba was set up as the apex institution for research, teaching, documentation and coordination of language studies in Nigeria (<https://www.ninlan.edu.ng>). How well the objectives have been met is another matter as, like many government institutions, funding has been a challenge over the years and not much has been achieved.

Since government has stopped working on the orthographies and the languages, the owners of languages that are yet to get approved orthographies should take up the gauntlet as they are the direct beneficiaries who have a lot to lose.

2.2 Corpus Planning

Corpus Planning, a strictly linguistic activity, focuses mainly on the overall development of a language for literacy and numeracy in its widest ramifications. There are four processes that a language goes through for it to be said to have arrived at the optimum level of sociolinguistic readiness viz, Graphization, Standardization, Codification and Modernization.

The process of **graphization** can be said to be partly successful since some languages already have orthographies and their writing systems developed for literacy. This is the most important step in the process of reducing a language to writing.

The process of **standardization** involves the selection, promotion and propagation of one variety of a language that becomes the written form. However, we note that the written form using the standard orthography does not stop any native speaker from speaking (pronouncing) his own variety, especially for languages that have not developed a Received Pronunciation (Quirk 1986). Over time, the written form will influence the spoken form. Again, what is observed with many of the indigenous languages is that speakers cannot really write them.

While the orthographies of the major languages Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba were written relatively long ago as well as those of some of the main languages, those of many of the small group languages are yet to be written, not to talk of being standardized. It is among this group that the truly endangered languages are found, those that can easily go extinct. Providing an orthography is the first step towards standardization. With

the orthography in place and in use, standardization will be attained with time. In homogenous languages such as Esan, which have dialectal varieties that are mutually intelligible, standardization has not been a challenge, given that there is no dominant variety in the language community. The fact that the different varieties are highly mutually intelligible means that variations are readily accommodated within the common frame of reference presented in the approved orthography. This is unlike in some other languages where arguments, serious disagreements sometimes acrimonious, have followed any choice of the selected dialect as the standard. Such challenges that are still plaguing some languages in the development of their language should be avoided because ‘an orthography controversy stifles the emergence of a robust, viable, popular and universally acceptable literary tradition’ (Emenanjo 2004:179). The irony of this situation is that while the speakers are quarreling about the choice of dialect for standardization, their language faces the threat of extinction.

Having overcome the first two processes, the third process is **codification**, the next in the development of a language. According to Crystal (1997:67), codification is the compilation of a systematic statement of the rules and conventions governing the use of a language variety, typically the standard language of a community. For Emenanjo (2004:180), codification is the systematic organization and documentation of the facts of a language as captured in books on spelling, grammar, dictionaries, encyclopaediae, counting/enumeration, metalanguage and style manuals. These documents serve as standard reference materials and act as guides on how to go about writing and also provides

explanations for steps taken. They serve to facilitate language cultivation via determining and establishing correctness and acceptability. Codification indicates that the language is developing gradually.

Languages that have no codification run the risk of being endangered or even going extinct. Many minority or small group languages are in this situation. Publishing works with data drawn from indigenous languages at the different linguistic levels enhances codification in the language. Codification is indeed very important because the whole process of organizing and documenting depends heavily on how good the orthography is. Hence, if the orthography is poorly done and is, for instance inconsistent, it will negatively affect whatever it is used for. Again, I draw examples from some of my published works in local and foreign journals on the description of various linguistic aspects of Esan across levels of linguistic analyses accompanied with rich data taken from Esan language including works on **phonology** such as Liquid elision in word-final syllables (Ejele 1994), Basic Tones (Ejele 2002), Extra-High Tone (Ejele 2004), Tonal Assimilation (Ejele 2003a), Contour Tones (Ejele 2003b), Intonation (Ejele 2003c); works on **morphology** such as Morphological Characterizations of Verbs (Ejele 1990), Cognate Relations between Verbs and Nouns (Ejele 1992), Status of some items as Verbs or Adverbs (Ejele 1996), Expression of Plurality (Ejele 1997), Word Formation Processes (Ejele 2005a); works on **syntax** such as Serialization (1991), Tense Markers (2000/2001), Ergativity (Ejele 2005), Mood and Modality (Ejele 2005b), Pronouns as deixis or anaphora (Ejele 2006); works on **semantics** such as Serial

Verb Constructions (Ejele 1994), Negation (Ejele 1995), Durativity, Punctuality and the Imperfective Paradox: The Case in Esan' (Ejele 2000/2001), Temporal Distinctions as bases for the semantic classification of verbs: Insights from Esan' (Ejele 2000), Aspectual Contrasts (2003), Honorific Distinctions (Ejele 2007). Details of the above are given in the References.

These works made Esan language visible to the world and facilitated its being listed as one of the languages of the world (Grimes 1992).

Apart from the major indigenous languages, many of the rest, especially the small group languages are yet to be codified. They are at different stages as there are so many provisions to be met. For instance, the *Rivers Readers Project* produced a lot of materials for Rivers State languages and it is an on-going process. There is still a lot to be done. Esan has some primers and a dictionary *Esan Dictionary*, edited by Dr C.G. Okojie, published in 2003. I was a Consultant to the Esan Orthography Committee that worked on it. Its availability was expected to enhance language development and lead to consolidation and restoration of linguistic pride in speaking their language while also engendering a sense of unity. Unfortunately, the dictionary is not readily available so its impact has not been felt much.

The last stage in the process of attaining sociolinguistic readiness is **modernization**. In language development, modernization is concerned with how to extend the language to be able to cope with new realities of life arising from culture contacts to express new experiences, science and technology to enhance the quality of life and standard of living, information

and communication. This will assist Nigerians to keep abreast of news and happenings, and globalization to make Nigerians operate as part of the world as a global village. Many of these have been done for the three major languages (examples include provision of The Technical Terminology for Primary Science 1978, The Legislative Project and The Metalanguage Project) but a lot of work remains to be done. Again, it is work in progress. Right now, small group are able to express new experiences via periphrases, borrowing and coinages which are understood by their speakers.

2.3 Language Planning

Language planning as a sociolinguistic concept, encapsulates the deliberate steps put in place to influence the function, structure or acquisition of languages or their varieties within a speech community. Language planning is part of language policy. It involves the establishment and implementation of a workable and effective National Language Policy. Language planning is critical in national development via having a viable, workable language policy. Unlike the major and main languages, small group languages are either underdeveloped or undeveloped and are spoken by a small population. The National Policy on Education (NPE) containing the National Language Policy (NLP) (1977 Revised in 1981, 1998, 2014) made provision for the use of Mother Tongue (MT) as a medium of instruction in pre-primary (nursery) and in the first three years of primary education, Junior Secondary School (JSS) and adult and non-formal education.

What is expected is for government to provide language and literacy policies across all levels of formal

education and functional literacy, adult literacy, non-formal literacy and further education to cater for every language group irrespective of its numerical size and diversities in their cultures. Things are not really going well for many small group languages which are not being used as the Language of the Immediate Community (LIC). In the case of Esan as the LIC in the five LGAs, it is not being taught as a subject or as the language of instruction in all classes from pre-primary, JSS and Secondary School (SS) levels. Failure to teach any Nigerian language at the lower levels of nursery, pre-primary and JSS is a sure path to language death (Ohiri-Aniche 2007:33). The use of the Esan language is limited to the home and the LGAs. This needs to be maintained and encouraged if the language is to have the chance of surviving.

Unfortunately, children do not speak the language and parents do not speak it to their children at home but do so with their own parents. Only the grandparents may speak it to their grandchildren who usually respond in English or NP. Adults who speak Esan do so with a lot of code-mixing and code-switching. This is a common phenomenon in all indigenous Nigerian languages.

As an **update information** on the NLP situation, the Federal Government via NERDC announced a new NLP which makes the MTs or LIC a compulsory medium of instruction from Primary 1 to 6 (<https://planenigeria.com> 2024). Government has directed that the medium of instruction/learning in the first six years of primary education is now the MT or LIC; it is left for the indigenous languages to put in place mechanisms of achieving this goal. This is more so for LICs such as Esan where the towns (Ekpoma, Uromi,

Irrua, etc.) have become cosmopolitan and even the villages are filled with so many non-natives working and doing business there and mingling with them, often using Pidgin. Interestingly, some of the non-natives and their children speak Esan.

2.4 Language Documentation

Facts of grammar, culture and how the language is used, activities such as farming, fishing, palm wine tapping or any peculiarities in the language and use of language in the life of the people are committed to writing. The process of documentation is usually comprehensive, covering all linguistic practices that are typical or associated with the people as a speech community (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). The whole activity of language documentation consists of collecting, processing and archiving of linguistic data. Things that can be collected and documented include videos and audio recordings of speakers telling stories of their ancestry, singing their native songs on various occasions, their version of tales by moonlight, conversations as documentaries, texts, word lists, etc.- all geared towards translation, preservation and distribution of the resulting materials (<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>).

Documentation of such languages goes beyond mere linguistic description at the different levels of linguistic analysis as focus is more on rigorous presentation of linguistic data. In addition, language documentation involves making records of speech events of a community available to a wide range of users. The whole exercise of describing and documenting the language is useful for restoration or archival

purposes for endangered languages. The small group languages are just too many to be taken care of. Some will definitely die as they have been dying. It is only realistic that they cannot all survive, after all, human beings also die. It has been predicted that by the end of the twenty-first century, some 90% of languages spoken now may disappear with the introduction of multimedia technologies of communication. So, it is a matter of survival of the fittest (Darwinian Principle).

There is need to salvage both oracy (spoken form) and literacy (written form). It is through literacy that we can write our literature and preserve our cultural heritage, folktales, folklores, idioms, oral tradition, proverbs, legends, peculiar expressions associated with rituals and stories that teach moral values as part of our cultural heritage (Ejele 1999, 2003). Saving endangered languages involves arousing interest in speakers of a given language to take pride in their language and desire to preserve it by getting the younger generation to use it (Bamgbose 2007: 4).

All we are saying is that no language should die without the owners putting up a fight. When all efforts fail, it is hoped that before it finally disappears, the endangered language can at least be documented for record purposes so that generations to come will know that their language once existed.

2.5 Speakers' Contribution to Keeping their Languages Alive

2.5.1 Keeping indigenous Languages Alive

Salvaging indigenous languages from possible extinction is a worthy enterprise that should be of concern to all of us. It is therefore not surprising that it has caught the attention of many linguists and language enthusiasts because almost all Nigerian indigenous languages are endangered. In an inaugural lecture presented at Delta State University, Abraka on 27th March, 2024, the Inaugural Lecturer Professor Macauley Mowarin, made a strong case for the use of Urhobo language at least at home and in the LGAs in order to keep the language alive and resist being overrun by the dominance of English. Taking this step beyond appeal and on a positive note, Jimitota Onoyome in **Vanguard** of June 26, 2024 reported the unveiling of Itsekiri scheme of work and curriculum for Primary and Junior Secondary Schools designed to provide a comprehensive framework for teaching and learning Itsekiri language. This will empower children with skills and knowledge that will enable them contribute to the rich cultural heritage of Itsekiri nation as a way of promoting their language and culture. The successful presentation of this scheme was a result of collaboration between home-based Itsekiri and diasporan Itsekiri people.

The onus of improving the status of one's language in the comity of languages requires more than loyalty and linguistic pride. Making the language viable and valuable lies squarely with the owners. 'No one will look after your wrapper if you treat it like rag'. Many minority languages' owners, having been enlightened about the possibility of their language

going extinct, have woken up from their slumber and are busy with a flurry of activities to stem the tide. Again, I tap on the Esan experience. Working with different groups including *Esan Magazine* Publishers Benin City, *Esan Club* 30 in Port Harcourt, Centre for Research and Development in Esanland (CERDEL) in Samuel Adegboyega University (now Glorious Vision University), Ogwa (owned by the Apostolic Church), *Association of Esan Professionals* (AEP) in Lagos and *Esan Okpa Assembly*, a number of conferences on Esan were held over the years. These conferences were geared towards acceptance, recognition, promotion and valorization of the language by way of enhancing and putting value on the language for its empowerment and use at home and in the educational system for the overall development of the language group as a whole. One sure way of valorizing any language is through intergenerational transmission.

Some of the conferences I participated in and presented papers as Guest Speaker include: (1). In 2007, paper presented was ‘Unity in Esanland: Today and Tomorrow’ at the launching of the book *Who is Who in Esanland* by Publishers of *Esan Magazine*. (2) In 2012, paper presented was ‘Esan People and Culture: Challenges and Prospects in the Twenty-first century’ on the occasion of Esan Merit Award and the Silver Jubilee Anniversary of *Esan Magazine*. (3) In 2015, ‘Culture, Gender and Education in Esanland: Issues and Relevance in the Twenty-first Century in the Development of Esanland’ was presented as part of the activities marking the Re-inauguration of the Centre for Research & Development of Esanland (CERDEL), and First Convocation of Samuel Adegboyega University (Glorious Vision University), Ogwa,

Edo State. (4) In 2016, at the 12th Esan Economic Empowerment Workshop organized by the Association of Esan Professionals (AEP), Lagos at Samuel Adegboyega University (Glorious Vision University), Ogwa, Edo State, I presented the paper ‘The Linguistic Characteristic of Esan Language: Towards its Empowerment and Development’. (5) In 2022, at the *Association of Esan Professionals (AEP) 2022 Education Trust Fundraising and Award Ceremony* in Lagos, I presented the Keynote Address ‘Education as a tool for the Economic Empowerment of Esan People: The Role of the Private Sector’.

The last conference organized by AEP in 2022 in Lagos had as its focus the role of education as a tool for economic empowerment of Esan people, to emphasize the fact that Esan people are interested not only in the preservation and development of Esan language and culture but in the overall development and well-being of Esan land and people. A number of recommendations were made. They now realize that there is real danger of losing their language since parents themselves are not transmitting the language to their children who therefore do not speak it. In addition, other factors such as inter-lingual marriage, urban movement, cosmopolitanism, internet and globalization influence and the rising profile of NP in Esanland are not helping matters. Esan people have to take interest and pride in their language and in their ‘Esan-ness’.

A strong awareness of linguistic and cultural identities, backed by strong attitude of language loyalty, language maintenance and nationalistic solidarity enhance the empowerment and development of the Esan language. A

further effect of the response to the re-awakening of the Esan spirit is witnessed in the increasing number of Esan groups in Nigeria and in the diaspora showing interest in the Esan language and Esan affairs. Other minority languages also had a similar experience. The earlier they learn to use their language, the better, because no matter the loyalty to the language, valorization and revitalization, the owners of the language *must* speak it, and use it in their homes and LGAs.

2.5.2 Keeping our Cultures Alive

There was also a lot of attention paid to culture being gradually lost too. According to UNESCO (2023), every language reflects a unique worldview with its own value systems, philosophy, and particular cultural features. The extinction of a language results in irrecoverable loss of unique cultural knowledge embodied in it for centuries. This includes historical, spiritual and ecological knowledge that may be essential for the survival of not only its speakers but also for others. Also, it can lead to loss of personal connect to who we are; the sense of belonging will be uprooted and fail to be passed on to the next generation. Many aspects of our culture are getting lost and we need to halt the slide.

Language is an integral part of culture so the role of language in the transmission and preservation of culture cannot be ignored. While culture is the way of life of a people in terms of its norms, mores, laws and beliefs which find expression in the society's art, artefacts, food, music, dance, dressing patterns, etc., language is the vehicle of transmitting our culture from generation to generation. The totality of these values, attributes, practices and mode of living distinguishes a

people. Culture is a highly complex and multifaceted phenomenon that shapes our worldview which we acquire through the process of socialization (Fasold & Connor- Linton 2010). The very process of socialization is carried out through the language as the mores and laws of regulation of societal norms are established and modulated through language. So, we see clearly that language and culture are intertwined in complex ways that are not easily separable (Ejele (2012).

The culture, history and tradition of a people are expressed in their language and Essien (1990:168) draws attention to the truism that ‘a community that neglects its language, neglects the quintessence of its humanity, not only as *homo sapiens* but also as *homo loquens*. A nation that does not recognize its linguistic character or fails to promote it, loses its mental and cultural heritage’. Languages spoken in the world are reflections of the traditions, thoughts and cultures of their people, all unique in their essence, and as observed by Montviloff (2002), ‘any loss of language is a disappearance of a pool of knowledge and an impoverishment of our cultural heritage and research capacities’. Indeed, a generation that fails to transmit its language to their children, or the next generation, has failed in its transgenerational duty. Hence there is an urgent need for revitalisation and valorisation of our languages and cultures.

The diverse and rich nature of cultures in Nigeria is a source of pride for each language group. Taking our example from Esan again, culturally, the Esan people and language are distinct even within the Edoid group of people and languages as there are certain foods (e.g. ‘black’ soup *omoebe*), dances (e.g. *igbabonelimin*), dressing (e.g. *igbulu* cloth used on

special occasions) greetings (*bo dia ye*) and traits that are associated with them. Identity planning is strongly influenced by political and cultural considerations. Esan language is clearly delineated as distinct, being fairly homogeneous. There are no issues with identity as the Esan language and people are easily identifiable among its closest relatives of Edo (Bini), Owan and Etsako in the Edoid group of languages. So, Esan language and people are easily identifiable in terms of geographical location, linguistic characteristic, cultural traits, historical antecedents, political awareness and sagacity, psyche and otherwise (Ejele 2012, 2015).

3.0 Current Status of Indigenous Languages in Nigeria

A lot has happened over the years to the status of indigenous languages and we need to take stock of their state and status. To do this, we look at the current number of extinct and endangered languages, the prevalence of Code Switching and Code Mixing in indigenous languages, effects of urbanization, globalization and multidimensional poverty on the fight to keep indigenous languages alive and the current status of indigenous languages, especially main and small group languages.

3.1 Extinct Languages and Endangered Languages

We draw attention to the fact that language death and endangerment are not strange as it is well established that hundreds of languages over the years have disappeared and are no longer living languages used by speakers and speech communities in their everyday lives (Wurm 1991, Brenzinger et al 1991). The disappearance is a continuous process as weak and less functional languages, with time, give way to the more

dominant and powerful languages. A language becomes extinct when there are no more speakers of the language. The sad point is that the cultural heritage, norms and traditions also get lost with time, as the speakers now take up the new language and culture. It must be pointed out that all indigenous Nigerian languages are endangered as they face the same risk when put side-by-side English. Grimes (1992: 336) lists a number of languages in Nigeria that are either extinct or nearly extinct and Blench (2012) lists 12 languages as extinct. We see that more languages are dying out and as an update, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2023) lists 29 Nigerian minor languages that have become extinct while another 29 are in danger of extinction (<https://www.vanguardngr.com>) some of which are listed below in 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 respectively.

3.1.1 List of Extinct Languages in Nigeria

Ajawa/Ajanci (in present day Bauchi State, became extinct between 1920 and 1940; the people now speak Hausa)

Basa-Gumna (Niger State and Plateau State)

Basa- Kotangora (Niger State)

Gamo-Ningi (a Kainji dialect cluster in Bauchi State, the people now speak Hausa)

Buta-Ningi in East Kainji

Homa/ Holma (Adamawa State)

Kubi (Bauchi State)

Kpati (Taraba State)

Odut (Odukpani, Cross River State)

Teshenawa (Jigawa State)

Auyokwa (Auyakawa, Awiaka in Jigawa State)

Ashaganna/Ashwagandha (a dialect of Shingini language, a Kainji language in Niger State)

Taura (Jigawa State)

Fali (Baissa in Southern Taraba).

Akpondu (Kaduna State)

Lufu (in Taraba State, its people now speak Jukun)

Kudu/Kudawa (in Bauchi State)

Shirawa (in Taraba)

Bakpinka (in Cross River State)

The following languages were picked out from among others as almost extinct because they have less than 100 speakers.

Centuum (in Balanga LGA, Gombe State)

Dulbu (in Bauchi State)

Mvanip (in Taraba State)

Sambe (in Plateau State)

Somyev (in Mambila Plateau in Taraba State).

Most of the extinct languages are from the small group languages which cluster mainly in Bauchi, Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau and Niger States, and very little is known about them and their speakers.

3.1.2 List of Endangered languages in Nigeria

Moseley (2010) UNESCO *Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*) classifies languages into various categories that reflect the degree of endangerment, based on five criteria, namely, safe, vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered and extinct, as discussed below.

1) Safety: - Not one of the over 500 Nigerian languages is really safe, except probably Hausa. Speakers of many of the

languages in the major and main groupings may be having a false sense of linguistic security since they think their languages are not in imminent danger of extinction. Writing on BIU Emirate in Bornu State, Usman (2014:71) notes that these languages are also vulnerable to pollution and dilution of original forms of expression. Moreover, since the process is gradual and almost unnoticeable, starting from language contact, it opens the door to borrowing. This in turn achieves a foothold through code-mixing and code-switching in the speech pattern. Consequently, over time, it results in language shift, by which stage, the language is endangered. Igboanusi (2004), Emenanjo (2007) and Onumajuru (2017) affirm the presence and prevalence of code-mixing and code-switching in the use of ‘Engligbo’ which has come to stay, flourishing in Igbo language as speakers now comfortably combine Igbo words with English words/expressions. They can hardly make a full Igbo sentence without adding English. This also occurs with Yoruba speakers. In fact, this is seen in Igbo and Yoruba Movies which one can follow because of this phenomenon. While the extinction of Hausa language is very unlikely, there are concerns about Igbo and Yoruba languages. UNESCO in 2006, had predicted that Igbo may become extinct in the next 50 years. Similarly, Akinyemi (2017) stated that the Yoruba language may die out in 20 years or less.

The fact that no indigenous language is safe is reflected in the rich Igbo data by Onumajuru & Oweleke (2022) amply demonstrating early code-mixing (C-M) and code-switching (C-S). This is currently at advanced C-M and C-S as the emerging new Igbo. The work draws attention to a drastic morphological modification currently going on that makes it

difficult to describe an expression as Igbo because an Igbo expression now has more English words than Igbo. More importantly, the three conditions for language loss are already manifesting in the Igbo language situation.

2) **Vulnerability**: Languages at the vulnerable stage are characteristically restricted to certain domains and spoken mostly by children in their homes. Examples are Bade (a West Chadic language spoken in Yobe and Jigawa States), Reshe (one of the Kainji languages spoken in Yauri LGA, Kebbi State and in Borgu LGA, Niger State), Gera also called Gere or Gerewa (spoken in Bauchi State), etc.

3) In **Definitely Endangered** languages, children no longer speak them as MTs at home. Examples include the Polci cluster (spoken in Bauchi State) and the Duguza languages (spoken in Plateau and Bauchi States).

4) In **Critically Endangered** languages, the youngest speakers are grandparents and older people speak it partially and infrequently, showing clearly that the language will likely die out with the ‘youngest’ speakers. Examples include Akum, Sambe and Yangkam languages in Plateau State, Bakpinka and Kiong in Cross River State; Derefaka in Opobo-Nkoro LGA Rivers State; Dulbu, Gyem, Kudu-Camo, Luri/Lori in Bauchi State; Iiue in Akwa Ibom State, Jilbe in Bornu State, Mvanip and Somyer in Taraba State.

5) **Severely Endangered** languages are spoken by grandparents and older generations. Parents may understand but do not speak it to their children or among themselves.

Examples include Gurdu-Mbaaru in Adamawa State, Fyem in Plateau State, Geji cluster in Bauchi State, Hya/Hyam in Kaduna State, Kona and Ndunda in Taraba State and Ngwaba in Adamawa State.

Most of the endangered languages are in Bauchi, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa and Jigawa States.

4.0 Challenges and Prospects of Keeping Indigenous languages Alive

Saving endangered languages involves arousing interest in speakers of the language to take pride in their language and desire to preserve it by getting the younger generation to use it (Bamgbose 2007: 4). So, the question for each language group, major and minor is, how do we keep our languages alive beyond our generation? What is the way forward? How do we empower the languages in order to keep them alive and harness them for personal growth, education and general development? Providing an orthography is one thing but getting the people to speak their language or even read and write it is another matter. It is important that people who own the endangered indigenous languages should be interested not only in the preservation and development of their language and culture but in the overall development and well-being of their land and people. Otherwise, they will certainly lose all as a group.

4.1 Challenges

It must be pointed out that there are challenges, especially in the face of:

1) the daunting and favoured status of English as *the* Official language being used throughout education- primary, secondary and tertiary levels, for national and international communication, especially in the face of Nigeria's complex multilingual and multicultural situation, for advancement, ICT, etc. All these functional realities guarantee the continuing relevance and dominance of English and put English at an advantage, for the foreseeable future not only in Nigeria but in the world at large. As things are now with indigenous languages in Nigeria, English is the most commonly used language; Non-Ethnic Yorubas and Igbos rarely speak their languages (Countries and their Cultures <https://human.libretexts.org>)

2) NP has a better chance of surviving the onslaught as its status, instead of diminishing, has been rising over the years now being spoken currently by over 60 million Nigerians (<https://en.wikipedia.org>), a figure that is higher than that for speakers of our native languages. Interestingly, while the numbers speaking our indigenous languages are diminishing, NP is now the most used language of wider communication apart from English. At the rate NP is going, it may well turn out to be the lingua franca we have been wishing to have.

3) The lack of trained teachers of these numerous native languages. There is a general lack of teachers even of other subjects in many of the institutions at every level. I am aware that some individuals and Alumni Associations recruit and pay teachers in their alma mater to fill this vacuum.

4) The few teachers that we have for the major languages are not taught to use their language as the medium of instruction.

5) There is no incentive for people to study, learn or teach our native languages. Government can easily rectify this situation by offering scholarships and secure employment at the end of the programme. If government fails to do so, each language group can take this up. After all, it is the possible death of their language that is at stake.

6) There is a dearth of literature on many of the languages so there is need to produce more. Funding is an issue. I believe that Linguists will be ready to work on small group languages and with language enthusiasts in collaboration with internal and external bodies willing to give grants.

7) Speakers of the indigenous languages are mainly proficient in oracy and can hardly read and write their language.

All we are advocating for is that owners of the local languages should use them consistently at least at home and if possible, at the LGA to establish and improve oracy, thereby preserving the language and averting its death.

4.2 Prospects

In spite of the daunting challenges, the prospects are not as bad or as gloomy as painted in the picture so far.

1) With the noticeable increase in collaborations and partnerships among interested groups in Nigeria and the diaspora, the future looks bright. Again, I tap into the Esan experience where the deployment of ICT and online platforms

is being encouraged in the teaching and learning of local languages across the world.

2) With respect to the need for more indigenous language teachers, on a positive note, in the case of Esan, CERDEL has started a Certificate programme on Esan Language. The Senate of SAUO(GVU) approved the commencement of teaching of Esan language through the Centre. The programme took off in September 2022, with teaching starting in October, being virtual and physical. The Certificate programme is in three phases, namely, beginners, intermediate and advanced levels to be done between three months to six months (Clevenard TV in Diaspora www.clevenard.com). Response to the programme has been encouraging. There is plan for a two- year Diploma and later a Degree programme. It is hoped that the programme will produce students and teachers who wish to make a career of it. Other minority languages can do the same.

3) Elizabeth Osayande (2023) in a special report published in the **Vanguard** newspaper of October 6, 2023, stated that Lagos State University (LASU) has taken a bold decision and a proactive step to stem the tide of indigenous language extinction by making Yoruba a compulsory course for all students. The essence of this is for them to connect to their roots and promote cultural diversity as a way of strengthening our unity and to encourage them to understand Yoruba people, their customs and tradition. The course is to be taught as GNS 104. As a fallout, student in-take to study the Yoruba language in LASU is expected to lead to an increase in admission. For prospective graduates, studying Yoruba language will provide an opening for a safe and legitimate means to emigrate to

greener pastures. Other institutions with interest in other languages may follow suit. However, this will be a challenge for universities in multilingual environments, based on the challenges we earlier pointed out. It will be interesting to see the impact of this bold decision on admission into LASU.

4) Although there have been legislations by other states to make their language compulsory in both primary and secondary education, LASU is recorded as the first to implement this at the tertiary level.

5) In another exciting development, 36 USA institutions now offer Yoruba language course and there were advertisements in Nigeria for teachers of Yoruba who would like to take on such appointments. This is a welcome step by the USA even though it would make the *Japa* syndrome worse. It is common knowledge that Nigerians, especially the young people, are bailing out of the country by any means, through deserts and seas risking their lives. In fact, it is expected that departments in other Nigerian universities that offer Yoruba language and culture will experience a boost in admission. We actually look forward to more of such incentives to encourage the study of Yoruba and create more opportunities for going abroad and improving standard of living.

6) Digitization is already being applied to languages. There are many applications already available online to assist our children in this generation to become acquainted with our local Nigerian languages. I am aware of Online Apps for Esan Learners, for instance, <https://youtu.be/>, among others.

5.0 Recommendations

To make children like to speak their indigenous languages and to keep aspects of their culture alive, the following steps are recommended. These cover a period in phases of short-term, covering advocacy at the family and communal levels, and medium term and long term on the way forward in ensuring the survival of local languages.

A. SHORT TERM

i. Advocacy at the Family Level

1. Parents and guardians should begin to actively and consciously use their language as a medium of interaction at home. This is the sure way to ensure generational transmission so it does not go into extinction.
2. As a way of encouraging children to speak their language, families can design games (**mental** such as riddles and jokes (in Esan *agbido-anee*), names of fruits/ parts of the body/types of fruits/foodstuffs/vegetables, etc., or **physical** as used to be done by adolescents in songs and moonlight dances).
3. Gifts can be given to children to motivate them to speak and interact solely using their language by, for example, having ‘An Esan-speaking Day’, ‘A Kalabari-speaking Day’, ‘An Ikwerre-speaking Day’, ‘an Ogoni-speaking Day’, etc. in the family. It doesn’t have to be money, just an incentive. It can be that the child who performs best will be exempted from house chores that day/week. The idea is to make learning and speaking our local languages interesting and exciting, not boring.

4. Parents/Guardians/Elders can tell the children their family history using their language, their stories/folktales, their heroes, how young ones greet elders, the value of respecting older people and elders, the dignity of labour, etc., that capture the essence of ‘Esan-ness’, ‘Kalabari-ness’, ‘Ikwerre-ness’, etc., depicting their principles and value system. This will in the long run help to tackle the current trend of materialism, get-rich-quick mentality and the unbridled quest for wealth by all means and other vices prevalent in modern societies.

5. There is need to be ICT compliant in order to get the attention of the younger generation who are digital savvy, the *Gen-Z* who are always on their phone. More application can be designed to assist in teaching and learning their language and also capture their cultural core values.

All these and more can be achieved if we are serious and truly appreciate the real and frightening possibility of our indigenous languages going into extinction.

ii. Advocacy at the Communal Level

1. Traditional rulers should ensure the use of their language as the means of interaction in their palaces and elsewhere where their people are gathered as a community.

2. The people themselves should, without apologies, be proud to speak their language at functions where their people are predominantly present, namely, burials, traditional marriages, birthdays, and other celebrations.

B. Medium Term

1) In towns and villages, especially the towns that have become cosmopolitan, their language can be used in church

activities especially where their people are more. For instance, in the Catholic Church, arrangements can be made in the relevant locality to have regular Esan Mass, Kalabari Mass, Ikwerre Mass, Ogoni Mass, Igala Mass, Idoma Mass, etc., so those who really want it can attend that particular Mass.

2) For indigenous languages that already have approved orthographies, such can be re-introduced at the workshops as a way of encouraging teachers to brush up their teaching of the language.

3) The language committee of each language or any other appropriate body should set up a committee of language experts to draw up a syllabus/curriculum for use in the Primary school up to Junior Secondary School level now that MTs have been approved as language of instruction from Primary one to six.

4) More collaborations and partnerships should be encouraged to deploy ICT and online platforms in the teaching and learning of indigenous languages across the world while focusing on children in our homes.

5) There is need to set up a Language Centre as a separate, independent entity. Alternatively, a university or a tertiary institution around where the language and people are, can be encouraged to set up a **Centre for Language Studies** to handle language and cultural matters.

C. Long Term

1) Re-awakening of interest in the culture through organizing traditional dances in dance competitions and festivals, culminating in yearly festivals held around December.

2) Serving of food and snacks at such activities. Who knows, maybe other people (non-Esan, non-Kalabari, non-Ikwerre, etc.) may like and adopt such, as we appreciate foods and snacks from other people, for instance, *amala* (from the Yoruba people) and *omoebe* black soup from Esan now regularly served in parties.

3) Theatre Artists can be encouraged to prepare dramas, plays, films, playlets illustrating the particular people's core values, taboos, customs, beliefs and other facts and artefacts of their life. I have actually seen such skits and playlets on Esan language and culture online.

4) Setting up of radio and TV stations will help to propagate the people's ideas and ideals, especially to the younger generation. For instance, in the case of Esan, there used to be a State Government TV station at Irukep in Ekpoma. Now, there are two privately owned radio stations - *Esan Binocular* and *A's FM*, both in Uromi. The Catholic Church has a radio station also in Uromi, Edo State.

6.0 Concluding Remarks

Short of sounding like a broken record, transgenerational transfer is the main key to reducing, slowing down or halting language extinction because as long as there are speakers, the language will stay and remain alive. The enterprise of

salvaging indigenous Nigerian languages primarily involves the cooperation of all of us - Linguists, educationists, language teachers, language planners and language speakers. Native speakers have to be aware of their responsibility in rehabilitating and elevating the status of their language. If we don't value what is ours, who do we expect to? Rescuing our languages calls for determination and commitment to the promotion of the language in the school system. It also calls for financial commitment. In the school system, language planners, teachers and educationists have to play their role. As regards financial commitment, the collaboration with interested language groups is welcome. We salute and encourage other language groups, organizations and the native speakers themselves to key into this vision so we can all work together to save our languages.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING.

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UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger category 2020

CITATION ON



PROFESSOR PHILOMENA EKEIKHOMEN EJELE

B.A English (Ife) PGD Linguistics (UC, London)

M.A Linguistics (UC, London) Ph.D Linguistics (UC, London)

Professor Philomena Ekeikhomen Ejele was born on the 10th of January, 1955 at Ekpoma, Esan West Local Government Area, Edo State to the late Mr. Michael Oriane Alli of Emaudo, Ekpoma, Edo State, and late Mrs Anna Arohu Alli (nee Aire) of Idimigun, Uhiele also in Ekpoma. She is the only daughter among six biological children.

For her Primary education, she attended St. Williams, Oke-Ado, Ibadan (1961-63), completing it at the then Marian Girls School, Benin City (1963-66) when she relocated to Benin City with her parents, at the creation of Midwest Region in 1963. Between 1967-71, she attended St. Maria Goretti

Girls Grammar School, Benin City for her secondary education and Government College Ughelli for Higher School education from 1972-73. She attended the University of Ife, (now Obafemi Awolowo University), between 1975-79 and graduated with B.A Hons. English, second class Upper division. She got married to Dr. Oseikhuemen Adebayo Ejele in 1978. She did the NYSC in Bendel State (1979-80), teaching at the Continuing Education Centre, Benin City.

After NYSC in 1980, she studied at University College, University of London between 1980-86 where she obtained the PGD (1981), M.A (1982) and Ph. D (1986) degrees in Linguistics. Her monumental, trail-blazing works on the Esan language laid the foundation for subsequent Esan language studies.

Professor Ejele worked in four universities in Nigeria starting from the Universities of Benin (1987) and Calabar (1988-90), and then the University of Port Harcourt (1990-date) in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, now Linguistics and Communication Studies. While in UNIPORT, she went on Sabbatical Leave in 2012 at Federal University Otuoke (FUO) and was on Secondment there from 2013 to 2016, returning to UNIPORT in 2016. Thus, having taught across four universities in Nigeria over the years, she has touched many lives, contributing to the production of manpower and sustenance in national growth and development. As a focused and assiduous worker, she rose through the ranks, attaining the rank of full Professor in June 2005, having published widely in local and international publication outlets and supervised many students' dissertations

and theses. She has held many positions over the years, details of which are listed in her CV, a few of which are listed below:

She has supervised many Ph. Ds dissertations on Igbo, Ogoni and Ikwerre on topics across morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Some of her students are now Professors. It may interest you to know Sir, that she does not speak any of these languages but successfully supervised them all, simply by her training as a Linguist, walking and working in the steps of great Linguists such as Professor Kay Williamson (Mama Kay) who worked extensively on Edoid, Igboid and Ijoid languages. Currently, she is supervising theses on Urhobo and Hausa languages. She also co-supervised Ph.D. students who specialized in Communication Studies.

She has held many positions over the years, details of which are listed in her CV, a few of which are listed below:

Director, School of General Studies, Uniport, 2020-22.

Pioneer Dean of the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences at Federal University Otuoke between 2012-2016 during her Sabbatical/Secondment. She served for two terms as the Pioneer Dean. Under her tenure, the six departments in the Faculty successfully got FULL Accreditation, at first attempt.

Pioneer Dean of The Post Graduate School, Federal University of Otuoke (FUO). (2016).

External Assessor, over the years for Professorial/Associate Professorial Appointments/Promotion for the Universities of Benin (2016-18), Calabar (2015); Federal University of Otuoke (2018), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (2020-22), Akwa Ibom State University (2021), National Open University (2018).

Internal Assessor of Professorial and Associate Professorial Appointment/Promotion in Department of Linguistics & Communication Studies and Department of English & Literary Studies, both in University of Port Harcourt. 2021-2022.

Head of Department, Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt 1997-99.

Chairman/Member of many committees over the years in the Department, Faculty, Graduate School, ASUU and the university in general, serving meritoriously as an active and dedicated staff and in various capacities.

Chairman, State Universal Basic Education Board (**SUBEB**), Edo State in 2008. Very brief stint (Political appointment by Senator Professor Oserheime Osunbor).

MEMBERSHIP OF ACADEMIC BODIES

1. Member, West African Research and Innovation Management Association (WARIMA).
2. Member, National Association of Women in Academics (NAWACS), Uniport Branch.
3. Associate Editor, Kiabara Journal of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, 2001-05.
4. Member, Faculty of Humanities Book Series Editorial Board.
5. Treasurer of Calabar Studies in Languages (CASIL) University of Calabar 1989-1990.
6. Member of Linguistics Association of Nigeria (LAN).
7. Member, West African Linguistic Society (WALS).
8. Member of Linguistics Association of Nigeria (LAN) Executive Council, Nigeria.

9. Member of Linguistics Association of Great Britain (LAGB) 1980-1988.

AWARDS WON / RECEIVED

1. Investiture with the Queen of Saints Medal as Noble Sister, Ladies Auxiliary, Knights of Saint John International on 29th October, 2022.
2. Certificate of participation in the Review of National Universities Commission (NUC) Instrument for ODL Accreditation conducted from 23 to 28 February, 2019.
3. Award in recognition as Distinguished Child of MARY presented by the Benin Ecclesiastical Province Catholic Women Organization (BEPCWO) at the 24th BEPCWO Seminar in *Our Lady of the Water Cathedral*, Bomadi, Bayelsa State on 1st September, 2018.
4. Matron of Altar Knights Association, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport. 2018-date.
5. Patroness of St. Anthony of Padua Society, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport. 2018 to date.
6. Award (via plaque) as SOLDIER OF CHRIST by Catholic Women Organization (CWO) *Chapel of the Annunciation*, Uniport, in Celebration of Motherhood on 18th July, 2017.
7. Award of Excellence as The Foremost Esan Linguist under the Distinguished Recipients of the AWARD OF EXCELLENCE of Esan Magazine for 2016/2017.
8. Certificate of Patronship awarded by St. Jerome Guild of Lectors, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport in recognition of her position as PATRONESS of the Association on 28th Feb. 2016.

9. Matron, Annunciation Ladies, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport. 2010-2016.
10. Esan Merit Award, December 26th, 2012 by Publishers of Esan Magazine.
11. Plaque presented by Nigerian Federation of Catholic Students (NFCS), Uniport, for contributions as a patron in 2012.
12. Matron, Diocesan Council Catholic Women Organization, Rivers State, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport Chapter, 2012-
13. Virgin Mary's Award for ROSARY ADVOCACY by Block Rosary Crusade, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport, 2009.
14. Academic Nobel International Award May 2008, given by Institute of Industrial Administration.
15. Fellow of the Institute of Industrial Administration. May 2008.
16. Grand Award for Productivity in Africa (GAPA) March 2008, given by People State & Resource (PSR) Magazine.
17. Woman of Merit Gold Award (WMGA) December 2007, given by PSR Magazine.
18. She is listed in many publications such as *Who is Who in Esanland* (2007) and *Achievers Who is Who in Nigeria* (2010) and *Eminent Personalities in Esanland* (2012).
19. Jerusalem Pilgrim, 2007.
20. Life Member, Diocesan Council Catholic Women Organization, Rivers State, Chapel of Annunciation Chapter, University of Port Harcourt, Choba, 2003.

21. Certificate of Honour from Nigerian Federation of Catholic Students (NFCS), Uniport, 1999.
22. Certificate of Service from Linguistics Student Association, Uniport, 1998/99 session.
23. Award of Excellence from Students' Union Government 1999, University of Port Harcourt, for service as Hall Warden King Jaja Hall 2.
24. Award of Excellence from Students Union Government 1999, University of Port Harcourt for service as Head of Department.
25. Certificate of Appreciation from Rotaract Club of University of Port Harcourt, 1996.
26. Linguistics Association of Nigeria (LAN) Representative at the 15th World Congress of Linguists in Quebec, Canada from 9th -14th August, 1992. Awarding Body was CIPL (International World Congress of Linguists).
27. Federal Government Scholarship as an undergraduate student at the University of Ife 1976-79 (not utilized).
28. Federal Government Bursary as an undergraduate student at the University of Ife 1976-79. (not utilized).
29. Bendel State Scholarship Award as an undergraduate at the University of Ife- 1976-79 (not utilized).
30. National Merit Award Scholarship for three years at the University of Ife 1976-79 as an undergraduate.

EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

For want of space and time, a very brief summary of her activities is given below.

1) Professor Philomena Ejele is a Lady of the Knights of St. John International (KSJI). In fact, she is currently the Respected President, Ladies Auxiliary Our Lady Tower of Ivory, number 710, based in the Catholic Chaplaincy of the Annunciation, University of Port Harcourt. She has attained Noble Status and is addressed as ‘Noble Sister’, having spent almost 25 active years in the Ancient and Noble Order.

2) An ardent, practising Christian who takes her faith very seriously, she belongs to many associations/organisations within and outside the Catholic Church, either as a member or a Matron. She also belongs to many academic and non-academic bodies and is a recipient of many awards for her dedication, integrity, selfless service, hard work and is well known as a stickler for rules and due process.

3) Professor P.E. Ejele (nee Alli) is happily married to Professor Oseikhuemen Adebayo Ejele from Ihumudumu-Ekpoma, currently the Pro-Chancellor of Mudiame University, Irrua, Edo State. He is a retired Consultant Haematologist, University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital and retired Professor of Haematology and Blood Transfusion, College of Health Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The marriage is blessed with children and grandchildren.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I present to you our Inaugural Lecturer today, a great Academic of International Standard, a true Scholar, a consummate Linguist, a teacher's teacher, a woman of integrity, a stickler for rules, an archival Professor, a Mother of Mothers and an all-round achiever, Professor Philomena Ekeikhomen Ejele.

Professor Owunari A. Georgewill
Vice-Chancellor