THE CHANGING STATUS OF THE NIGERIAN NATIVE SPEAKER: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract:

Globalisation has taken its toll on different aspects of human life, having both positive and negative effects on the languages spoken around the world in particular. As a consequence, the concept of the native speaker is becoming increasingly blurred and is in danger of becoming lost. Researchers in different disciplines have highlighted the inimical import of the term (Cheng, Burgess, Vernooij, Solis-Barroso, McDermott & Naboodiripad, 2021). However, it is necessary to preserve the term in order to maintain the native speaker's identity (Kim, 2022) and authenticity. Every Nigerian has an ethnic language by virtue of the fact that their parents are Nigerians which makes him/her the possessor of an L1 or first language. But, does the possession of a mother tongue qualify a person to be a native speaker in Nigeria in the traditional sense of the term? Some other children have acquired Nigerian English as their first language and cannot communicate in any other language except Nigerian English. As a consequence, could they also be termed 'native speakers of English?' Similarly, would children who have acquired Nigerian Pidgin (Niger Delta region) as their first language also be referred to as native speakers of Pidgin? There are also deaf people in Nigeria and similar questions emerge about how best to describe their native language. It is against this background that this paper undertakes a critical literature review to examine the changing status of the Nigerian 'native speaker' and the nuances associated with it, many of which are often ignored or concealed in the attempt to understand it as a homogenous term. Arising from the literature review, the paper argues that in future, Nigerian indigenous languages may become extinct and that to guard against this outcome, there is a need to preserve native languages in the country, hence the status of its speakers. The study concludes that the use of the term 'native speaker' is losing its currency and recommends the

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preservation of the concept as it symbolises the language rights of the minority and a model source of data for the language (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1989; cited in De Gruyter, 2012).

Keywords: deaf, globalisation, native speaker, Nigeria, changing status

1. Introduction

The term 'native speaker' is much-used around the world (Lowe, 2017) and has attracted many definitions (Davies, 1991; Maum, 2002; Medgyes, 1992). Most aspects of the term have been critiqued (Lee, 2005) but common usage continues to identify it with the notion of a fluent speaker of a language which was acquired during childhood (Davies, 1991). The term 'native language' is used interchangeably with 'mother tongue' and 'first language' by some researchers as they are deemed to be synonymous as a consequence of globalisation. While globalisation has impacted the world, it has had positive and negative effects on language usage. One such negative effect is the extinction of indigenous languages (Helhumeau, 2012), while a related one is that it threatens the native speaker's position (ibid). As a result of this, the concept of the native speaker needs further evaluation, particularly within Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and in particular in the Nigerian context, which has attracted few research studies to date. Arising from this gap in the knowledge base, the objectives of this critical literature review are to examine the use of the concept 'native speaker' within the Nigerian multi-language context and to fill a gap in the existing literature by exploring its unstable status and nuances (Solhi, 2016). In conclusion, the paper argues that there is a need to preserve native languages and cultures as well as the term 'native speaker' in order to maintain one's identity, within the Nigerian context.

1.1 Background
In Nigeria, while there are over 500 languages, English is the official language of the country. The National Policy on Education (2004) promotes learning in the mother tongue and where this is not available, the language of the immediate environment is recommended (NPE, 2004). Nigeria is multilingual (Chiatoh, 2005) and every citizen has an ethnic language by virtue of the fact that their parents are Nigerians and each Nigerian has an indigenous (ethnic) language, which makes him/her the possessor of an L1; thereby qualifying as a native speaker. This begs the question, however: does the possession of a mother tongue, qualify a person as a native speaker in Nigeria and thus as Paikeday (1985, p.1) asks, *"gifted with special and often infallible grammatical insights?"* Presently, most youths in Nigeria cannot speak their ethnic languages as their parents rarely exposed them to such languages (Ndagi, 2021 & Adegbite, 201), and English has become a dominant language because of globalisation (Uwen, Bassey & Nta, 2020). Can they then be considered native speakers of their ethnic languages? Some other children have acquired Nigerian English as their first language and cannot communicate in any

other language except English, though their proficiency in Standard English is low. Would they then also be termed native speakers of English? In the same vein, can children who have acquired Nigerian Pidgin (in the Niger Delta region of the country) be considered to be native speakers of Pidgin? There are also deaf people in Nigeria. While the education of the deaf in Sub-Saharan Africa commenced in the 19th Century (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003), what is their native language? Against this complex and evolving backdrop, this paper will evaluate the continued legitimacy and value of using the term 'native speaker' in the Nigerian context.

2. Methodology

A critical literature review was conducted with a total of 28 journals, 2 doctoral theses, 11 books and monographs, 10 news reports, 5 conference proceeding papers and 4 blog posts. The search terms were: the first language, the difference between first language and mother tongue, the native speaker, the status of indigenous languages, native speakers of English in Nigeria, a declining standard of English in Nigeria, native and non-native teachers of English, sign language, and Nigerian Sign Language. The databases were Google Scholar, ResearchGate and Academia.edu.

Table 1: Study Themes

Themes Searched	Journals	Thesis	Books and Monographs	Reports	Conference Proceedings	Blogs
The native speaker	- Cheng et al., 2021; - No & Park, 2008; - Lee, 2005; - Solhi, 2012; - Medgyes 1992; - Kiyaga & Moores, 2003; - Emeka-Nwobia, 2015; - Bamberger-Hayim, 2018; - Moyo, 2022; - Nyika, 2014; - Saniei, 2011; - Helhumeau, 2012.	Lowe, 2007.	- Davies, 1991; - NPE 2004; - Adegbite, 2010; - Crystal, 2008; - Emenanjo, 1990; - Kroon, 2003; - Gagne et al., 1987; - Miah, 2017.	- ERIC Digests Maum 2002; Daily Trust Ndagi, 2021; - ADEA-Chiatoh, 2005; - Ojoye, 2018 ; - The Punch, UNESCO 2004, 2018; - Paste Magazine; - Darbha, 2017.	- Adeniyi & Bello, 2006; - Tom-Lawyer, 2011; - Saniei, 2011.	Liberman, 2021.
First language	Mizza, 2014.				Farify & Syaodih, 2017.	
Mother tongue and first language					Chan, 2015.	
The status of indigenous	- Emeka-Nwobia, 2015;					

languages in Nigeria/ indigenous languages	- Adeniyi & Bello, 2006; - Anyebi, 2014; - Ndagi, 2021.					
Attitudes toward English	Dako & Quarcoo, 2017.					
Native speakers of English in Nigeria	- Uwen, Bassey & Nta, 2020; - Umera-Okeke, 2019.					- Campbell, 2020; - Kperogi 2015.
Native speakers of English/ Native speakers' perceptions	- No & Park, 2008; - Jaber & Hussein, 2011.					
Declining standard of English in Nigeria				- Akinnaso, 2018- The Punch Newspaper; - Olaopa, 2019 -		
Native and Non-native teachers of English	- Arva & Medgyes, 2000; - Nagamine, 2017; - Kurniawati & Rizki, 2018; - Taiwo, 2009.					
Nigerian Pidgin English/ Pidgin	Agbo & Plag, 2020.	Izenose, 2018.	- Yule, 2010; - Mufwene, 2017; - Wardhaugh, 2010.	- Kperogi, 2010- - Ibukun, 2010- Guardian		Goglia, 2005.
Sign Language/ Nigerian Sign Language	Asonye, Asonye & Edward, 2018.					

3. Review of Research Literature

Defining the following key terms is crucial to understanding this debate: native speaker, mother tongue and first language. Firstly, mother tongue is synonymous with a first language and it is also referred to as the native language of an individual. UNESCO (2018, p. 4), for example, defined the native language as "*the language that a person learns to speak in early childhood. The same term can be used to define an ancestral or heritage language, which is referred to a language spoken by the ancestors of a specific civilization*". It is usually acquired during childhood and is considered to be the ethnic language of a person.

In other words, a mother tongue is acquired and a language which is not acquired cannot become a mother tongue. This is contrary to the assertion of Skutnabb-Kangas (1984, p. 88) *"that it is possible to have a mother tongue that one is not competent in";*

incompetency here would be in tandem with non-acquisition of the language as this also depicts the native language. UNESCO's definition does not account for the acquisition of two or more languages by a child during childhood and therefore raises the question, which would become the mother tongue? Kroon (2003), building on the meaning of mother tongue given by Gagne, Daems, Kroon, Sturm, and Trrab (1987), viewed the definitions of the term from three perspectives: linguistic, language policy and education. From the perspective of linguistics, the mother tongue, which is synonymous with the first language and native language, is nurtured by the child's mother. In other words, it is the *"home language"* (p. 36). The language policy perspective is associated with the need for a mother tongue in the person's native country. This mother-tongue needs to be provided by education. A standard language, which needs development and standardisation, is required in this situation. From the educational point of view, *"it is the official standardised language variety that is used as a school language i.e. that serves as a medium of teaching and learning in the educational contexts"* (p. 36). These three perspectives are relevant in this review as they are very much related to the multilingual Nigerian context. From the linguistic perspective, the mother tongue is linked with lineage and consequently, there are several controversies surrounding its use alongside related terms such as 'vernacular' and 'local languages'. Faridy and Syaodih, (2017), speaking from the Indonesian perspective, view the mother tongue as being synonymous with the vernacular or local languages; the vernacular language, which is regularly used merges with the mother tongue, while the first language, which is a language of unity, unifies regions. Dardjowidjojo (2014; cited in Faridy & Syaodih, 2017) argues that the first language learnt by a child is the mother tongue, while the mother's language is the language of communication adopted by the child's parents in the process of the child's acquisition of the mother tongue.

The mother tongue can be lost as a result of migration or lack of continual exposure to it at home (Bamberger-Hayim, 2018). Some of the factors that continue to diminish it include migration, mixed marriages and internationalisation (Faridy & Syaodih, 2017). In a study conducted to analyse the benefits and challenges of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, Beka (2016) showed that some of the challenges related to the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction include restrictions in career advancement and job opportunities. Moreover, parental occupation was found to be a predictor of a child's attitude to indigenous languages (ibid). On the other hand, the main benefit of the mother tongue is that it preserves indigenous languages and can aid the acquisition of more languages (Faridy & Syaodih, 2010). In Tanzania, Swahili is the medium of instruction throughout primary school, and as a result, foreign investors draw their workforce from neighbouring East African countries, where the citizens have a higher proficiency in English. In the same vein, the use of mother tongues (such as Kiswahili) as the medium of instruction in universities may have a negative long-term impact (Nyika, 2014) as graduates will be limited in every facet of life.

Mizza (2014, p. 1) refers to the first language (L1) as *"a child's native or first acquired language"*. This is contrasted with the second language or L2, which is learnt. The first

language of a child is usually acquired and the environment a child is exposed to will determine this. For example, children of Nigerian parents born abroad would typically acquire English as their first language. Therefore, the mother tongue of such a child would be the native language of the child's parents (considering the fact that the parents can decide to speak their indigenous language to their children). According to Chan (2015, p. 2), the "*mother tongue is the inborn language which a child has already familiarised even in the gestation of the mother before it was born, while a first language is a language, which a child acquires either through schooling or socialisation such as family*". In addition, he concludes that the difference between a mother tongue and a first language is no longer applicable to the English milieu. Therefore, this paper argues that the difference between the mother tongue and first language is blurred and needs further, more nuanced exploration, depending on the context. Specifically, in the Nigerian context, the mother tongue would suggest one's ethnic language; this certainly was the view during pre-and post-independence and before the formulation of the National Policy on Education (2004), which introduced the concept of the "*language of the environment*". Most Nigerian children acquire the language of the environment in which they were raised; thus, such languages become their first language because they were acquired first and the language of the environment may not be the mother tongue of the child.

3.1 Research Questions

Against this complex backdrop, this paper evaluates the continued legitimacy and value of using the term 'native speaker in the Nigerian context guided by the following research questions:

1) Who are the native speakers of Nigerian indigenous languages?
   This question examines the criteria for determining the native speakers of Nigerian indigenous languages.
2) Who is a Nigerian native speaker of English?
   This question investigates the status of the Nigerian native speaker of English.
3) Who are the native speakers of Nigerian Pidgin English? This question considers whether there is a Nigerian Pidgin English and establishes the basis for the use of the term Nigerian Pidgin English speakers.
4) Who are the native speakers of Nigerian Sign Language?
   This question considers sign language in Nigeria and the native speakers of Nigerian Sign Language.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Who Are the Native Speakers of Nigerian Indigenous Languages?

Crystal (2008, p. 321) defined the native speaker as someone for whom a particular language is a first language or mother tongue. The implication is that the native language having been acquired naturally during childhood is the one which a speaker will have

the most reliable intuitions of and whose judgements about the way the language is used can therefore be trusted.

Adopting this definition, by implication, there are native speakers of indigenous languages in Nigeria as the country is multi-lingual with over 500 languages in existence. The status of these languages has been described as developed, undeveloped and under-developing (Emenanajo, 1993, 3; Aziza, 1198, p. 257; cited in Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). The languages have also been classified as Class A, B and C languages; these are major, official and minor languages respectively (Adekunle, 1976; cited in Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). These languages are aboriginal to Nigerians (Adeniyi & Bello, 2006).

There are three major languages in the country – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – which are all prominent in the North, East and Western regions of the country respectively. There are also minor languages such as Itshekiri, Ijaw, Idoma, Igala Isoko and so on (Anyebi, 2014), which implies that language is a very volatile issue in Nigeria. The linguistic diversity of Nigeria is ranked second to Papua Guinea which has over 800 languages (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). There are over 250 ethnic groups in the country, with the major ones including Yoruba (15.5%), Hausa (30%), Igbo (15.2%), Fulani (6%), Tiv (2.4%), Kanuri/Beriberi (2.4%), Ibibio (1.8%), Ijaw/Izon (1.8%) and numerous others (24.7%) (World Factbook, 2021).

Therefore, all of these languages in Nigeria have native speakers. Presently, these native speakers are composed of more middle-aged and older people as research shows that the younger generation of the population in the cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria are monolingual (Uwen, Bassey & Nta, 2020). In addition, most young people in the country, as a result of the disposition of their parents to indigenous languages, were never exposed to them, which means that they cannot speak them (Ndagi, 2021; Dako & Quarcoo, 2017 & Adegbite, 2010). The plurilingual nature of the country has endeared the English language to Nigerians as English has become a symbol of integration (Tom-Lawyer, 2011) and a lingua franca in the country.

Pidgin English is another language, which has made inroads into the sociolinguistic landscape of Nigeria. Umera-Okeke (2019), for example, asserts that Nigerians are bilinguals and multilinguals as Nigeria lacks a national language. Some younger people in cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria are monolinguals (Uwen et al., 2020), some are bilinguals as they can code-switch using two languages, while others are multilingual. Arising from this analysis, Uwen et al. (2020) predict that in the near future, these groups of native speakers will greatly reduce if not become non-existent, as most youths have much less interest in maintaining the currency of the indigenous languages in the country (Uwen et al., 2020). Emeka-Nwobia (2015) corroborates this point by arguing that the status of English in Nigeria's development has relegated the standing of the indigenous languages in the country.

4.1.1 Who Is a Nigerian Native Speaker of English??

The term 'native speaker' implies "*one who has internalised a language rather than learning it deliberately*" (Darbha 2017, p. 1). In other words, a native speaker acquires a language

and does not learn it. Some reasons have been adduced for the offensiveness of the term 'native speaker of English'; firstly, it portrays the inadequacy of the non-native English speaker. Secondly, it entails hiring people in order to reduce costs Thirdly, teachers receive lower salaries because they are non-native speakers.

English has clearly emerged as the official language in Nigeria and it unites the country, making communication across all sectors of the economy more effective. The status of English as a global language has further strengthened its position in Nigeria as the country has become a leading economic power in Africa. English is an official language in Nigeria; Campbell (2020) claims that 10% of Nigerians speak English as their first language though this is not based on verifiable data. The language is a prerequisite for educational advancement in the country. It is studied as a subject and it is a medium of instruction and communication. As a medium of instruction, as well as a ticket for economic, social and political progression, its role in the country's linguistic landscape cannot be underestimated.

The status of English as a global language has given a new connotation to the term native speaker of English, although controversies continue to surround the definition of the term, more so, when there are speakers of English as a second language. The results of a study conducted by No and Park (2008) reveal that the participants identified two types of English: English spoken by people who speak English as a first language, and the other varieties spoken by second-language speakers of English. Hence, there are native speakers of English as a first language and native speakers of English as a second language, and this understanding is based on the premise that the status of English has changed. The English spoken in Nigeria is a variety for non-native speakers (Jaber & Hussein, 2011). In addition, the interviewees in the study also perceived the native speaker of English as one who has competence in the language; in other words, anyone who can communicate in the language or is mutually intelligible in the language (ibid). This is of course a rather broad definition of the term. Applying the criterion of competence, Nigerians may not be judged to be competent in the language as social media platforms and training conducted in schools demonstrate that there has been a decline in the standard of English in the country (Akinnaso, 2018; Adeboye, 2016 & Olaopa, 2019).

While this paper argues that there are no native speakers of English in Nigeria, research from Kperogi (2015) argues otherwise. The argument of this paper is based on the following key assumptions. First, Nigerian forebears were not English. Secondly, a native language is associated with a person's identity (Kim, 2019) and this is not the case with Nigerians. Thirdly, culture and language are inseparable; Nigerians do not fully possess the culture of the native speakers of English though it is learnt in the process of acquiring the language. Furthermore, probably the most authentic argument derives from Kachuru's (1985) model of concentric circles, which states that the speakers of English from the Inner circle should never be regarded as native speakers of English. As Igene (2021) suggests, then, Nigerians should not be considered native speakers of English but more appropriately described as native speakers of Nigerian English.

Research also shows that researchers have explored the dichotomy between native teachers/non-native teachers of English (Arva & Medgyes 2000; Nagamine, 2017; Kurniawati & Rizki, 2018). Prior to Independence, Nigeria had native speakers (missionaries) of English as teachers of the language, particularly in the Southern region (Taiwo, 2009). As Saniei (2011) suggests, the forces of globalisation have dimmed the definition of the term native speaker of English more generally and this is especially evident in the complex, multilingual context found in contemporary Nigeria.

4.1.2 Who Are the Native Speakers of Nigerian Pidgin English?
Yule (2010, p. 292) defines Pidgin "*as a variety of a language that developed for a practical purpose such as trade but which has no native speakers*". In other words, Pidgin developed out of necessity. The language is "*thought to be from the Chinese version of the English word business*" (Yule, 2010, p. 247). Nigerian Pidgin English has been described as a derivative of English and Nigerian indigenous languages (Izenose, 2018). It is "*regarded as a mark of identity and solidarity*" (Akande (2010), cited in Izenose, 2018, p.1). According to Goglia (2005), "*Nigerian Pidgin can function in some contexts as an act of identity (United Kingdom), when speakers need to stress their 'Nigerianness' as opposed to ethnic identities*". Research also shows that another name for Nigerian Pidgin is broken English (Kperogi, 2010). There are some younger groups in Nigeria who have acquired Nigerian Pidgin as their first language (Niger Delta region) and they are competent in the language, though Wardhaugh (2010) is of the view that pidgin is not their first language and there are no native speakers of Pidgin (Mufwene 2017; cited in Britannica; Wardhaugh, 2010 & Yule, 2010). Indeed, it has been described as "*the most neutral language in the country*" (Deubidgner 2005; cited in Akande 2010, p.4).

Nigerian Pidgin has variants depending on the locality and where it is spoken. Nigerian Pidgin emerged as a consequence of the contact between English/Portuguese and Nigerian languages. Some years ago, Nigerian Pidgin was associated with people in the lower strata of society; however, presently, it is spoken by the generality of the people (even elite groups) and it is commonly spoken in the southern part of the country. Research shows that Nigerian Pidgin has the highest number of speakers and some groups in the minority have it as their first language (Igboanusi, 2008; cited in Agbo & Plag, 2020). In addition, it has gained prominence in its use by higher institutions (Agbo & Plag, 2020). Akande (2010) noted that the language is distinct in terms of its verb phrases which are different to those of Standard English. Moreover, it was established as a result of the contact between Nigerians and Europeans, and consequently, it has been used in the media and by prominent Nigerian creative writers such as Wole Soyinka, Ken Saro Wiwa and Chinua Achebe.

This paper adopts the stance of Mufwene (2017; cited in Britannica, Pidgin Linguistics section, para. 1), who showed that there are no native speakers of Pidgin English "*as the population that uses it during occasional trade contacts maintain their vernaculars for intragroup communication*". However, Edionhon (2018) argues that there are native speakers of Nigerian Pidgin in the Southern Niger Delta (Edionhon, 2018) and

presently, the Naija Languej Akademi is producing a guide for Pidgin (Guardian, Ibukun, 2010).

4.1.3 Who Are the Native Speakers of Nigerian Sign Language?

While Nigerian Sign Language is used by the deaf community, the country lacks a national sign language. The deaf community has been described as "*a group of people, who live in a particular location, share common goals of its members [and] and may include persons who are not themselves deaf but actively support the goals of the community and work with deaf people to achieve them*" (Padden, 1989; cited in Asonye, Asonye & Edward, 2018, p. 1). The total population of deaf native speakers of the language is unknown; however, Treat (2016, cited in Asonye, Asonye & Edward, 2018) asserts that 23.7% Nigerians are deaf, while 84% of the same population have not had formal education. Formal education in this context means learning within the four walls of a school, with a teacher and learning aids. Research by Asonye, Asonye & Edward (2018) shows that most (75%) of the deaf people in Nigeria were not naturally deaf but had circumstances that led to the development of their condition; some of the causes include health, penury and unawareness. In Sub-Saharan Africa, formal education was introduced through the missionary work of Andrew Foster (Kiyaga & Moores; cited in Asonye, Asonye & Edward, 2018) and the education of the deaf community tended to be marginalised and poorly integrated within it. Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (2008) argue that the mother tongue of the educated deaf is Nigerian sign language, while non-educated deaf people use their indigenous sign languages (Ethnologue, 2021). Moreover, Hay (2012) opines that the mother tongues of the deaf globally are sign languages.

4.2 Definitions of Mother Tongue

The definitions of the mother tongue by Skutnabb-Kangas (1994) will be applied within the Nigerian context.

Table 2. Definitions of mother tongue

Criterion	Definition
Origin	The language learned first.
Identification a. Internal b. External	a. The language one identifies with. b. The language one is identified with as a native speaker.
Competence	The language one knows best.
Function	The language one uses most.

Source: Skutnabb-Kangas (1984, p.18).

An example of the application of the mother tongue concept in the Nigerian context, using the short definitions shown in Table 2 is given below, while the use of the criteria above gives a fuller understanding of the term within the Nigerian context:

1) Speakers of Indigenous languages: this set of speakers have ethnic languages, which may be the majority or minority languages. This group is known as "*blood*

natives" as their status is dependent on citizenship or clan or humankind (Miah, 2017, p. 11). They can be found among the elderly or middle-aged population in Nigeria. They cover all the criteria used in the definitions. This group may not include the elites as they tend to use English most.

2) Speakers of English as a First Language: this group, which is composed of mostly the youths in urban areas (Kperogi, 2015) who have acquired English as their first language. These are the "*loyalty natives*" (Miah, 2017, 11) as their status is dependent on their acquisition of the English language. They were never exposed to their ethnic languages. The criterion of origin qualifies the Nigerian English spoken by the members of the group as the mother tongue since it was acquired first. However, by identification, it will not be their mother tongue as they are not recognised as native speakers of the language as a result of the fact that their parents are not of English descent. Native speakers of English are the British, some South Africans, Australians, Canadians and Americans etc. (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). There are two sides to competency here: English is the language they know best but that would be in the context of Nigerian English and most Nigerian youths lack proficiency in Standard English; relative to the real native speakers, they lack competency in the language. This paper argues that language and culture are inseparable (Sook & Park, 2008), and that Nigerian youths who have acquired the English language as their first language do not fully possess the culture of the English people, hence, they cannot be said to possess English as a mother tongue.

3) The third group is the speakers of Nigerian Pidgin English. They have acquired Pidgin English as their first language (Niger Delta region) and are not competent in any other language. According to Mufwene (2017; cited in Britannica, Pidgin Linguistics section, para. 1) "*Pidgins have no native speakers as the population that use them during occasional trade contacts maintain their vernaculars for intragroup communication*". This group does not speak any other language; therefore, it has no vernacular that it maintains for intragroup communication. From the criteria, people in this group speak Nigerian Pidgin. However, they are identified externally with other ethnic languages though they have not acquired such languages; therefore, they lack competency in them.

4) The deaf (hearing impaired): the evaluation for this group will be based on the argument of Hay (2012) that the mother tongues of the deaf globally are sign languages, while as Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (2008) argues, for the non-educated deaf it is the laissez-faire language they are identified with. In other words, the mother tongue of the educated deaf is the Nigerian sign language, while for the uneducated deaf, it is indigenous sign language.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this paper has shown that the concept of the native speaker within the Nigerian context is unstable. Therefore, the term should be preserved in order to maintain the status of the native speaker and the native languages

5.1 Implications
Arising from the discussion above, the implications of the study are:

Most young people in Nigeria lack competency in spoken English and particularly, in writing. It is also unfortunate that the youths, who acquire Nigerian English as their first language, lack competency in standard English as well as in their indigenous languages. Therefore, they cannot be considered to be native speakers of Standard English and their native languages.

More opportunities should be given to the deaf to be educated as this would empower the community.

Some Nigerian parents have a negative attitude towards the indigenous languages; indigenous languages are endangered (Emenajo, 2010; Mowarin, 2010) and marginalised (Asonye, 2021).

The evaluation shows that in future, there will be a decline in native speakers of the various indigenous languages in Nigeria as most parents do not expose their children to the indigenous languages.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study, the paper recommends the following:
1) Parents and the Nigerian government should improve the teaching of English. Parents should provide reading materials for their children to be able to learn the language more effectively and the government needs to provide adequate resources to equip schools to enable students to master the language.
2) Parents should speak their mother tongue to the children before the commencement of kindergarten, in other words, pre-school age.
3) The government should invest in the education of the deaf community so that Illiteracy and stigmatisation can be eradicated (Eleweke, Agboola & Guteng, 2015; Ajavon, 2006 & Eleweke, 2002).
4) Indigenous languages should be revitalised (Olthius, Kivela, Suvi & Skutnabb, Tove, 2013); orthographies should be developed for such languages.

Further areas that need exploration are the native speakers of indigenous Nigerian sign languages, the preservation of native identities and the bilingual native speaker, and these will be the topic of future research.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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