Teaching Urhobo as a Second Language through Poetry to Pupils in the Immediate Environment

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The Urhobo people who are found in the southern part of Nigeria have nurtured and promoted other languages and left their own language to perish. Urhobo has done this to the extent that even in Urhoboland, a great number of Urhobo people do not understand the language, and even if they do understand it, they are not able to speak it because it had not been their practice to respond in Urhobo language when they are spoken to or to speak it to people. As the Proprietors of this language realise that the language is being lost, there is a bid to resuscitate it. How can this be done since the Urhobo language has gradually lost its status of first language? In this work, the possibility of teaching Urhobo as a second language was discussed. Various methods of second language teaching were examined. The nature of poetry was also discussed and the means of teaching Urhobo through poetry was examined. The method of research applied was eclectic and it was based on the Theory of Naturalism.

Keywords: Teaching, Urhoboland, foreign language, immediate environment, Pupils.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching: According to Meegan (2014) “Teaching is the art and science of helping others to grow in their knowledge and understanding”. Smith (2018) refers to it as “the process of attending to people’s needs, experiences and feelings, and intervening so that they learn particular things, and go beyond the given”. This “particular thing” to be taught is the Urhobo language. It is to be taught to learners in the Urhobo language community. It has been noticed that the trend in recent times is for the Urhobo people to neglect the Urhobo language while speaking the Queen’s English, pidgin or even other indigenous languages. This trend has brought about the situation where one’s native language has to be taught as if it were a foreign language. Urhobo language is currently being taught at the Delta State University and in recent times the curriculum to teach it at the secondary school level has been integrated into the educational system of Nigeria.

Language: Verderbar, Verderbar and Sellnow (2016) define language as “ … both a body of symbols (most commonly words) and the systems for their use in messages that are common to the people of the same speech community”. Ejedafiru and Ejobee (2012) say that “Language is the manifestation of culture and tradition which is the most enduring artifacts of any group”. Crystal and Robins (2018) see language as, … A system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release. This actually describes the Urhobo language. There is a general notion that the Urhobo people, numbering about two million, who speak the Urhobo language are located in the Delta State, in an area referred to in political parlance as the “south south” zone of Nigeria. Aziza, (1997, 2007), Otite (2011) and Akpofure (2015). Ejedafiru and Ejobee, (2012) reaffirm this when they state: “The Urhobo nation of about two million people is the most populous in Delta State and the territory is located in the tropical rainforest belt of the Western Delta region of Nigeria”. This fixes the home of the Urhobo people on arrival from the Edo lands in the particular location where they are found today. They
have neighbours. The Ijaws, the Itsekiris, the Kwaless, the Edos and others not very close but close enough to influence the use of their language. Egere (2012). Mowarin (2005) also cited in Akpofure (2015) confirms this when he says:

One of the reasons for the contraction of languages in Urhobo culture is the polyglossic situation in Urhobo land. Urhobo languages have open social networks; they have contact with other indigenous languages that envelope them. The ethnic groups that encircle Urhobo land are the Binis in the North, the Itsekiris and the Ijaws in the South, the Isokos and the Ukwonis in the East and the Itsekiris in the West. Language and cultural contacts and inter-ethnic marriages between members of the neighbouring ethnic groups have led to a shrinkage in the use of urhobo languages in Urhoboland. This is due to the assimilatory effects of the neighbouring languages.

According to Ekeh, (2008), Otite (2003) “There are 22 Urhobo sub-units, (i.e. clan or polities) who all speak different dialects. In recent times, the Urhobo people saw the birth of two new polities, bringing it all to 24 polities. Tonukari (2018). Urhobo has many dialects, but the “…Agbarho dialect is the standard variety, spoken generally across the Urhobo community and used for writing the language”. Aziza, (2007) cited in Akpofure (2015).

When this topic is taken into consideration, one wonders why Urhobo should be taught at schools as a second language especially in a geographically Urhobo linguistic zone. If one was thinking of Urhobo being taught in places like Britain, America or even Ghana or Togo; then it would not be out of place for Urhobo to be taught as a second or even a third language. But, as it is, one is at home in Nigeria, in Delta State, in Urhoboland where Urhobo language is supposed to be the mother tongue; yet one thinks of Urhobo being taught as a second language? “Why indeed should the Urhobo language be taught as a second language?” Perhaps answers will be found to this question, as the study progresses.

According to Mowarin (op cit.)

The 2,000 indigenous languages in Africa spoken by about 480 million Africans (Crystal 1997: 316) are now threatened by English, French and Portuguese languages as well as their pidgins and Creoles … African languages are going extinct due to the belief of Africans in the inferiority of their indigenous languages and the superiority of former colonial languages.

The Urhobo language is one of the 2,000 indigenous languages. Much that has been written about the language has heightened the awareness of the predicament of the Urhobo language as one in danger of extinction. According to Ejedafiru and Ejobee (op cit) “… Children brought up in their immediate environment do not speak their indigenous language let alone read or write in them. Their parents, who though understand and use the indigenous language discourage their children from doing so and would prefer that they go for English”. This again brings to mind what Mowarin (2005), also cited in Akpofure (2015), Akpofure – Okenrentie (2016, 2017 and 2018) says about the “miguo generation children”. The only Urhobo word these children can speak is “miguo”. Mowarin (op cit), cited in Akpofure, (2015), also said “pidgin … has now penetrated the orbit of homes in Urhoboland … Nigerian pidgin has already acquired a number of native speakers …”. This situation has stirred well-meaning Urhobo men and women to explore means of revitalizing the language. Ejedafiru and Ejobee (op cit), state that the “National Policy on Education (1998) stresses the importance of the language as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion … preserving culture”. If the National policy on education actually stresses this importance, it means that in Nigeria, individual native languages should actually be understood and spoken by individuals of given languages. This implies that the Urhobo language should actually be understood and spoken by every child and parent alike. That is why the National Policy also contains the clause “… every child in Nigeria shall learn the language of the immediate environment”. Let us note that even though the native languages of the individual environment should be the language which is spoken in the environment, Pidgin, which is not supposed to be the language of the environment has actually taken over our native environments; robbing the environment of the native language. This explains why the native language, even though it is seen as the language of the environment has to be taught in the classrooms as a second language. For Urhobo children and other persons who have experienced Pidgin, English or other languages as their first languages Urhobo, which is the language of the Urhobo environment, would have to be taught to Urhobo pupils as a second language. Also, Aziza, in Ekeh (2005), cited in Akpofure (2015) gives us another possible reason why Urhobo could be taught as a second language when she suggests that: “In most communities in Urhoboland today, it is easy to observe that while the elders, i.e. the supposed leaders, have Urhobo as their mother tongue, the youths, i.e., the supposed followers have pidgin as theirs”. This means that Urhobo is no longer a maternal language to the Urhobo child/youth even though he is born to Urhobo parents. This is an indication of a language shift which must have taken place in the lives of the parents even before the child/youth was born, and which the child now inherits. It is very possible that the very first words the parents said to him at birth would not have been said in Urhobo, but in the new preferred language of the parents. This makes the new preferred language the first language of the new born child/youth because this is the language which they would continue to speak to him as he grows up. This gives credence to what Mowarin (op cit.) says in Ekeh (2005), cited in Akpofure (2015) and also in Akpofure-Okenrentie.
Language shift is a social phenomenon, whereby one language replaces another in a given (continuing) society. It is due to underlying changes in the composition and aspirations of the society, which goes from speaking the old to the new language. By definition, it is not a structural change caused by the dynamics of the old language as a system. The new language is adopted as a result of contact with another language community, and so it is usually possible to identify the new language as “the same” as, that is, a descendant of, a language spoken somewhere else, even if the new language has some new, perhaps unprecedented, properties on the lips of the population that is adopting it. Language shift results in the spread of the new language that is adopted, and may result in the endangerment or loss of the old language, some or all of whose speakers are changing their allegiance.

This is exactly the state of the Urhobo language today. Careless of the effect that this language shift and eventual loss would have on the culture and traditions of the people, Urhobo continued to embrace other languages to the detriment of her own language. For example people generally greet “míguò” these days without the accompanying act of genuflection which, culturally and traditionally should go with it. The Urhobo “míguò” is now equated with the common form of salutation “good morning”, a form of cursory greeting when compared with the depth and meaning of the word “miguo”. Credit still has to be given to the cultured Englishman who accompanies his “good morning” with a bow. Also, a certain expression which has become rampant in Urhoboland for some time now is the Igbo word “amugwo” which has taken the place of the Urhobo word, “Ómiówwo-énó” to nurse a new mother. These days, the Urhobos hardly say “mí ré ní ómiówwo” / “I am going to nurse the new mother (and child)”. Instead they say “Mí kpó amugwo” / I am going for amugwo”. Through the media, the Igbo man has made the word “amugwo” extremely popular and sold it to the whole nation, and possibly even to climes beyond Nigeria. Yes, wherever the home video is watched the word “amugwo” has gone there. Culturally, amugwo as a word is meaningless to the Urhobo person. But in Igbo, it has a tradition that goes with it. The Urhobo grandmother who now adopts the word would lean more towards the tradition that goes with it than to what obtains in her own tribe, Urhobo. It is possible for the word “Ómiówwo-énó” to be forgotten while the Igbo word “amugwo” takes root in Urhobo land. What then happens to the mother-tongue? It is a fact that with one lost meaningful expression of a language is also the loss of the tradition and culture that go with it. As Mowarin (2005) says:

The languages of Urhobo culture are the main symbol of the people as an ethnic nationality. The languages give their speakers positive self-image. The gradual death of these languages is therefore a sign of the disintegration of the unity of the Urhobo nation. Once the languages which the languages which bind the Urhobos together die, the basis of their unity and group identity will be undermined.

Clearly, effect of language loss is not only on the language, it also affects the person.

Ideally, Nigerian Pidgin is supposed to be a language of inter-ethnic communication in Urhoboland. However, it has now penetrated the orbit of homes in Urhoboland. It is now being used as a language of intra-ethnic communication in urban centres like Warri, Sapele, Effurun and Ughelli and other semi urban centers like Abraka, Oghara, Agbarho and Eku. Nigerian Pidgin has already acquired a number of native speakers.

Urhoboland is replete with examples of these “native speakers” of Pidgin. This clearly points to the fact that the supposed “mother-tongue” has lost its place to Pidgin and the foreign language and taken the place of the foreign language as a second one. As Mowarin (op cit.) also cited in Akpofure (2015) declares:

Nigerian Pidgin is now the mother-tongue of many children in urban centres. It is now the only language used by semi-literate and illiterate Urhobos in homes in urban centres. It is the language of intergenerational transmission from parents to their children in these homes. To the Urhobos, Nigerian Pidgin is socially viable to its users while the Urhobo languages are socially unviable.

Clearly then, neither in the homes of the “semi-literate” nor in the homes of the literate does the Urhobo language enjoy the status of first language. This is why Urhobo now has to be taught as a second language even in Urhobo land. What then do the proprietors of the Urhobo language do? Some of the elites, regretting sincerely their roles in the predicament of the language now think of ways to salvage it. Ejedafiru and Ejobee, (2012) affirm this when they say “Teaching and learning of Urhobo language in Delta State and diaspora has been a thing some Urhobo sons and daughters at home and abroad have been show casing”. They should not just showcase it anyway. The teaching and learning should be effected, practised, and returned to being the culture, the tradition, like our Fathers did it with us.
OBJECTIVE

The state of the Urhobo language has determined the objective of this work. The main objective is to save it from going extinct, to examine the possibility of revitalizing the Urhobo language by teaching it as a second language and to increase the population of the speakers. As language is linked to culture and tradition another great objective is to revive the culture and tradition which the language shift had caused to erode.

METHODOLOGY

For this research to be fully accomplished, data has been collected from books, other studies and also from the internet. The poems used in this article have been taught to 15 students of a 300 level class (course code LLU 313, Forms of Urhobo Poetry during the 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 sessions), in the Department of Languages and Linguistics, Delta State University, Abraka. For the purpose of this article they were used as oral structural exercises, and experimented with 10 students. These students have acquainted themselves with the poetic sequences by memorizing the poems and reciting them. In a second sequence they generated vocabulary from the words in the poems. Finally, they used the expressions in the poems in similar situational sketches created in the class. Most of the poems in question are poems which were written by the Course Lecturer, Dr Carole Ejomafuvwe Akpofure-Okenrentie. They are unpublished.

Theory of Naturalism

Crystal and Robin’s definition of language calls to mind the vision of an 8 month old baby, Dola in the year 2012. She was sitting on the floor, playing when suddenly she says, clearly, distinctly, without any help, cajoling or any form of encouragement, the word, DAYO. This is the first distinct word she says; her older brother’s name, a name she has heard repeatedly for eight months. How did she learn to say this word so perfectly? One would say it was by natural instinct. This action is indicative of Naturalism. According to Singh (2009), “Naturalism prescribed (1) Learning by doing, (2) Learning by experience (3) Learning by play as the basis of teaching”. This must have been Dola’s experience. No one really taught her to say her brother's name at this point. She learnt by listening, by observing, by doing while playing and responding to the natural promptings of a child’s adventurous nature. Singh, (op cit.) supports the above claim when he says that ”In the field of Education, Naturalism means the education of child according to his inherent nature”. Imagine a situation where a teacher would have been telling the child repeatedly to say a word which she had not imbibed and therefore not yet ready to articulate; think of all the time, the pain, the trouble, the tears and of course the animosity that would have taken place; yet the word still would have neither been learnt nor articulated. Compare this to when the child learns naturally on her own. Imagine that moment of triumph when the child says her first distinct word; and everyone turns to look at her with a cry of surprise. See the comic expression on her face which says: “What .... what is it? What have I done? And she laughs hilariously! (She laughs because she is happy. To her, she has accomplished a feat). Then she says her brother’s name repeatedly and she crawls after him as if to say “I must keep on saying this word lest I lose it! … Must keep on at it, keep on at it!” It is poetic! Learning like this is natural and poetic. Poetry is creativity. In language learning, it is one of the qualities that are born out of repetition. Poetry goes hand in hand with the audio lingual method because as poetry acts, the learner watches and listens; then the learner acts out what she has learnt while watching and listening. Note that watching and listening are natural instincts of the child. When it comes to language what applies with first language should also apply in second language because the learner is beginning at the same point of learning. The theory of Naturalism, applied to second language learning would help the learner apply himself to the learning of the language which he has set out to learn.

Information and communications technology (ICT)

In this era of technology, teaching and learning is facilitated by the availability of instructional equipment such as audio and visual aids, slide films etc. All types of aids are within reach once one accesses the internet. It may be argued that the use of such equipment negates the idea of naturalism. That will not be the case. It should rather be seen as enhancing learning. The television in a language learning classroom provides the ambience for watching and listening which are the first steps in language learning; which are also the first steps the baby takes in his own process of language acquisition. For Promin Technology Group (2015), Information and communications technology (ICT) is often used as an extended synonym or as an umbrella term for information technology (IT), but is a more specific term (i.e. more broad in scope) that stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications (telephone lines and wireless signals), computers as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage, and audio-visual systems, which enable users to access, store, transmit, and manipulate information.

If the first poem that is used in this research would have been dramatized, with the visual picture of “Oghērè” sitting cross-legged in front of the class as she says “migub”, and the vision of hands being clapped as well as the sound of clapping hands heard as the recitation is captured, a recording which would later be used in teaching Urhobo language could be made available. This is an aspect of what Information and communications technology (ICT) is about.
To effectively teach Urhobo as a second language through the use of poetry, certain exigencies have to be met. Segments of the teaching process have to be stored: i.e. the poems, the various stages of recitation, the various sequences of actions, drama and pronunciation that take place in the teaching and learning process all have to be stored for purposes of continuity either as revision activities or the teaching of new students. Information and Communications Technology is now extremely popular in teaching. It is indeed, very important and a necessary tool in the business of education. Fgnievinski (2016) affirms that:

Today's society shows the ever growing computer-centric lifestyle, which includes the rapid influx of computers in the modern classroom. ... Information and Communication Technology can contribute to universal access to education, equity in education, the delivery of quality learning and teaching, teachers' professional development and more efficient education management, governance and administration.

As it concerns the teaching of Urhobo as a second language, it would serve to bring various types of teaching and learning methods (which are applicable to Urhobo and poetry) together under one umbrella as is shown in the following diagram.

![Diagram of methods of teaching through poetry](image)

**METHODS OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH POETRY**

By means of Information and Communication Technology, collaboration is possible between the various methods since, at one point or the other they would all actually be applicable in the teaching of Urhobo as a second language through poetry.

**Seven methods of teaching a second language**

Some of the methods of teaching a second language as listed by Richards and Rogers (1986) are (1) The direct method (2) The grammar translation method, (3) The audio-lingual method, (4) The structural approach (5) Suggestopedia (6) Communicative language teaching (7) Immersion and lots of others. Most of the teaching approaches are pointed mainly towards the English language but they also have implications for Urhobo as a second language.

**Direct method:** Richards and Rogers (op cit) discussing the direct method explain that “In this method the teaching is done in entirely the target language. The learner is not allowed to use his or her mother tongue. Grammar rules are avoided and there is emphasis on good pronunciation”. Stradivarius (2012) also states: “The direct method of teaching ... is sometimes called the natural method” and he agrees with Richards and Rogers and he defines it as: “Direct method is a method of teaching language directly establishing a direct or immediate association between experience and expression, between the English word, phrase or idiom and its meaning through demonstration, dramatization without the use of the mother tongue”.

Although these definitions refer to the teaching of the English language, (as was noted earlier) it has implications also for the teaching of Urhobo as a second language. That is to say that Urhobo lessons for example, would be taught purely in Urhobo language without the intermediary of any other language, neither English nor pidgin. Something exciting and very important about this method is that the teacher would have to be a dramatist, who transmits the content of the lesson through gesticulation and demonstration. This has to be so because speaking an unfamiliar language to a learner is somewhat like speaking to a deaf person; the least to be done is to explain the words by actions, signs, gestures and demonstration, since there is not supposed to be any interaction in a familiar language, these movements would aid in the communication and understanding of the subject.

**Grammar translation:** Concerning grammar translation, here is what Richard and Rogers (op cit) explain. “Learning is largely by translation to and from the target language. Grammar rules are to be memorised and long lists of vocabulary learned by heart. There is little or no emphasis placed on developing oral ability”. This is the same as what French language teachers would refer to this as “méthode indirecte”, (Indirect method). Also, Stradivarius (op cit) implies this when he says that the direct method “contrasts with the grammar translation method”. To explain what grammar translation is Tymon (2015) says:
The grammar translation method is a method of teaching foreign languages derived from the classical, (sometimes called traditional) method of teaching Greek and Latin. In grammar translation classes, students learn grammatical rules and then apply those rules by translating sentences between the target language and the native language. The method has two main goals. ... To enable students read and translate literature written in the source language and to further students general intellectual development.

It would seem that the move of poetry is rather dramatic and would not possibly accommodate grammar translation because in poetry, the parts of speech (grammar) are spontaneously learnt.

**Audio lingual method:** With the audio lingual method, the sounds of words (pronunciation) are first heard and drilled extensively, before the learner finally sees the words. This way the pronunciation of the words does not pose any difficulty because of the drills. Richards and Rogers (op cit) affirm this when they say:

> The audio lingual method, Army method or New Key, is a style of teaching, which is used in teaching foreign Languages. It is based on behaviourist theory, which professes that certain traits of living things, and in this case humans, could be trained through a system of reinforcement. The correct use of a trait would receive positive feedback while incorrect use of that trait would receive negative feedback.

This is actually what poetry is all about because one does not just read poetry. One speaks poetry. One acts poetry. Constant speaking and repetition of poetry is much like the drill which leads to fast speech competence which is required in language acquisition.

**Structural Approach:** With the structural approach, grammatical rules are learnt one at a time and very well mastered before another segment of rules is taught. Here is what Rosheni (2015) says in support of this assertion. The Structural Approach is a technic wherein the learner masters pattern of sentence. Structures are the different arrangement of words in one accepted style or the other. It includes various modes in which clauses phrases or words might be used. It is based on the assumptions that language can be best learnt through a scientific selection and grading of the structures or patterns of sentences and vocabulary.

The Structural Approach brings to mind the structure of poetry itself. Although the sentence in poetry may not all come in one breath, but, when the various pauses are considered and the words are delivered sensibly, the poetic sentence makes great meaning at the end of the articulation. The difference is that in poetry, one would not have to learn the rules of grammar one at a time. The rules as well as the senses fall into place as poetry speaks and acts. Poetry is beautiful! Its structure is wonderful. Its language is peculiar! The language you teach through poetry is likely to be very quickly learnt.

**Suggestopedia method:** In the “Suggestopedia method” a learner who dislikes the idea of learning a new language is encouraged and persuaded to see that learning a new language is not really that difficult. Richards and Rogers (1986) discussing the origin of “Suggestopedia” affirm that: Suggestopedia is a language teaching method developed by the Bulgarian psychologist, Georgilozanov ... The name of Suggestopedia is from the word, suggestion and pedagogy. It is a set of learning recommendations derived from suggestology, which Lozanov describes as a science concerned with systematic study of the non-rational and / or non-conscious influences that human beings are constantly responding to. The method also draws insights from yoga and the Soviet psychology. From yoga it draws the importance of relaxation of mind for maximum retention of material. From Soviet psychology Lozanov took the idea that “all students can be taught a given subject matter at the same level of skill.

Language learning coming through poetry is not at all tension. It is a form of relaxation while learning. Poetry will take the learner through the humorous side of learning and add some colour to the language being learnt. Uwhobo language as a subject would not be such an onerous one to learn if suggestopedia is applied to its learning.

**Communicative language teaching:** In communicative language teaching the learner is made to really absorb the elements of the new language, such that he is able to use it, express himself using the words he has learnt in real life situations. According to Keith (2015) “Communicative language teaching (CLT), or the communicative approach, is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study”. This implies that much consideration is given to the learner; a situation where the teacher wants to ensure that everything the learner needs to communicate is made available to him. In this wise one can look at poetry as a means of communication that actually appeals to the emotion, not just of the learner who is speaking it but also of the audience. The poetic sequences and the moves are such that would stay in the minds of those imparting the language as well as the spectators.

**Immersion method:** Another method of language teaching is the Immersion method. In this method the learner is removed from his normal linguistic environment and placed in the environment of the new language. This
means that the learner would only be surrounded by the sounds and communicative pronunciation of the new language, being completely separated from the language he has been used to hitherto since everything the learner does and learns would be in the new language. Here is what Richards and Rodgers (op cit.) have to say about it: “This corresponds to a great extent to the situation we have at our school. ESL students are immersed in the English language for the whole of the school day and expected to learn math, science, humanities etc. through the medium of the target language, English”. This is also what happens when French students go for the year abroad immersion program. With this method the target language is quickly and efficiently learnt.

Teaching Urhobo through poetry

What is poetry? There are countless definitions of poetry. Among these countless definitions Gucci (2016), says “Poetry is a form of literary art in which language is used for its aesthetic and evocative qualities in addition to, or in lieu of, its apparent meaning … It is the art of rhythmical composition, written or spoken, for exciting pleasure by beautiful, imaginative, or elevated thoughts”. Nemerov says: “Poetry, literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound and rhythm”. Cobuild, (2018) defines poem as “ … a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for their beauty and sound and are carefully arranged, often in short lines which rhyme”. Finch (ND), notes that Cobuild’s definition “opens the doors to carefully arranged, written or spoken, for exciting pleasure by beautiful, imaginative, or elevated thoughts”.

In poetry, there is repetition and this repetitive quality of poetry. To emphasize the importance of repetition in the learning of the Urhobo language, he says that:

By stressing enjoyment, and presenting poetry “through media and methods that provide maximum student involvement and interest” (Brindly, 1980, p1), not only can language learning be facilitated, but learners at all levels can use the medium of poetry to express themselves in the target language.

In poetry, there is repetition and this repetitive quality of the poem can be likened to the “drill” which obtains in the audio-lingual method. This helps fixation to take place in the learner’s mind. By teaching Urhobo through poetry the Learner is also exposed to both the culture and tradition of the language which are intricately intertwined with it. Take for example, the unpublished Urhobo poem, “Îguéréfìá” written by Akpofure-Okenrentie, the author of this article. Understand that the word “míguò” means “I am on my knees”. Therefore if one says “míguò” while sitting, standing, running, walking, or lying down, the one tells a lie. That is why the title of this poem is “Îguéréfìál!” Apart from teaching the language, this poem also teaches the Urhobo culture of salutation as well as its vocabulary. Also, the repetitive sounds and rhythmic clapping of the children’s hands, while the poem is being recited expresses a lot. It adds colour to the teaching of Urhobo as a second language. The word “Ôghèrè” describes someone of very little worth. A “nonentity”. The author uses this expression because of the distaste which she attaches to this form of deceptive salutation. “Ó vé phíyó”, “Gbèrèwò fíá” describes the posture of the nonentity at the time when she says “míguò”. She can be visualised sitting cross-legged on a sofa and she is reported as saying “míguò”. “Âne óyè îguè!” “Chat!” In Urhobo, this is an expression of derision, which is renounced immediately by anyone who uses it, especially the elders; hence “Me na wee” follows it at once. This segment is also repeated thrice, but finally, the Writer, disdaining the retraction, reaffirms “MÈ NÀ WÈ!!!”. Repetition is a very important quality of poetry. To emphasize the importance of repetition, in the learning of the Urhobo language, here is another poem titled:

This poem teaches:

1. Urhobo vocabulary
   i. îghôrè, hook (fishing hook)
   ii. iyèrì, Fishes
   iii. óghwò, soup

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<th>Îguéréfìá!</th>
<th>Untruthful greeting</th>
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<td>Îghôrè ná!</td>
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For living i i i i i i i i
iv. égwú, fufu (a type of pounded meal. It can be a mixture of any two types of grains or tubers)  
v. úsí, starch  
vi. igáří, garri (made from milled cassava and fried dry).  
vii. ónē, yam  
viii. órhé, plantain  
ix. ídù, cocoyam  
x. Ídù. Name of a place in ancient times  

According to Osahon (ND) “What is today known as Edo or Benin City was originally known as Idu”.

2. Urhobo phonemes  
i. óghóre o [o], gh [ɣ], ϕ [φ], r [ɾ] and e [e]  
i. Iyéri [iYɛr]  
i. Óghwó [ɔywo]  
i. egwu, [eegoo]  
v. úsí, [osis] starch  
vi. igáří, garri [iɡari]  
vii. ónē, [onɛ]  
viii. órhé, [ɔrhɛ]  
ix. Ídù, [idoo]  

At the end of the poem there is a play on the words “Ídù”, and “idù” which have the same spelling but different meanings and different pronunciations.

For the purpose of this study we limit ourselves to the first two: listening and speaking since these are termed as the “first two natural language skills”. These two skills are involved in the use of poetry in language teaching. Listening as an art in learning a language is unavoidable. This means that when poetry is recited or read out loud, as the case may be, the learner listens to hear, not just the words, but also the accompanying sounds as the words are articulated. This way, the learner is able to repeat the words which he listens to and hears. The next two skills are not natural but artificial in this context. Morehouse (op cit) is talking with reference to first language acquisition, but what he says also has implications for the teaching of Urhobo as a second language. The fact is that in language learning be it first language or as second language, the learner is required to first be exposed to these beginning skills. This implies that the Urhobo language learner should be seen more as a child who simply watches and listens as the language is spoken around him. He learns a lot in a short space of time and learns to articulate what he hears.

The diagram displayed earlier shows clearly that (1) In poetry and the direct method, the recitation of the poem for teaching has to be done purely in Urhobo language without
the intervention of any other language. (2) Poetry and the audio-lingual method dovetail into the direct method. For example, poetry recitation involves two activities, i.e. speaking and listening. In these two activities, “poetry” is spoken in Urhobo. “Poetry” is also heard in Urhobo. This is an aspect of the “audio-lingual” method. In the process of these two activities taking place, no other language was involved. It translates directly from speaking to hearing in the language being learnt. This is also an aspect of the "direct method". In the course of the recitation and dramatization, audio-lingual is also involved. (3) One of the aims of the communicative language teaching is that at the end of that learning situation, the learner would be able to use the vocabulary he learnt when he/she is confronted with similar situations in real life. This is amply effected through poetry because of the repetition of words. (4) Suggestopedia highlights “The importance of relaxation of mind”. This is in line with the soothing effect which poetry has on those who speak it as well as those who listen to it. Learning a language in a relaxing state of mind is to be encouraged at all times. (5) What the structural approach and poetry have in common are sentence structures. The sentence in this approach may not be exactly like that of poetry but at the end communication does take place although what is said may be said in different ways. (6) There is a question mark in the “Grammar Translation” section as shown in the figure. There is grammar in poetry. The question is: Is the grammar in poetry obedient to the rules of grammar? Can the grammar in poetry be translated without a loss in meaning? Would the spontaneity in poetry allow for grammar translation? These are questions one needs to answer if one is to successfully teach Urhobo as a second language by the use of poetry and grammar translation. (7) Poetry and immersion method would have been ideal for the Urhobo language learner (ULL). This is because the ambience for immersion exposes the learner only to the language being learnt. The learner would be in an atmosphere where everything is done according to the Urhobo tradition, things are bought and sold in Urhobo, Urhobo type of food is prepared, every word is spoken in Urhobo; there would be songs by moonlight, folk-tales by the fireside at night, etc. The question is: Is there anywhere in Urhoboland today where Urhobo is still exclusively spoken? The place for Urhobo immersion is supposed to be a place where Urhobo is solely spoken. A place where everything is done in Urhobo. But these days even the aged in Urhoboland now speak pidgin, more than they speak their own language. But, the immersion method is worth mentioning because just like the Badagry French Village has been created in Nigeria, an Urhobo village can also be created somewhere in Urhoboland. This is possible to accomplish if the system is willing to provide it.

**FINDINGS**

i. In Urhoboland, the mother tongue, Urhobo has lost its place as Language 1

ii. The older generation of Urhobo people who should see to the preservation of the language do not speak Urhobo. They speak Pidgin and other languages like Itsekiri and others.

iii. The younger generation of Urhobos are not interested in speaking Urhobo. They mostly speak pidgin.

iv. From personal observation a certain nonchalance was noticed in the behaviour of parents and guardians towards the use of the Urhobo language. This explains why Urhobo does not enjoy first place anymore, but must now be treated as second language.

v. Of the various methods treated, it was noted that the direct method, the audiolingual method, the communicative method and the immersion method could work well with poetry in the teaching of Urhobo as a second language.

vi. It was also noted that the immersion method would be difficult to accomplish.

vii. It was also noted that the immersion method could be made possible if the system would create an Urhobo language village in any of the Urhobo speaking community.

**CONCLUSION**

Generally speaking, it cannot be said that one particular method of language teaching is perfect and therefore is adopted to the exclusion of all else. Neither, can any one method be claimed to be deficient that it has to be completely rejected. So, in teaching Urhobo as a second language, many methods are possible, since the deficiency in one method is made up for by the efficacy in another method. Carefully, analysed therefore, it could be seen that teaching Urhobo as a second language through poetry also involves the use of the direct method, the audiolingual method, the Structural as well as the Suggestopedia method. The possibility of teaching Urhobo as a second language through poetry has been examined in this article. It has been found that while some methods like direct method and audio-lingual methods would work well with poetry some others like grammar translation method and the structural approach would not. The grammar translation method for example raises some pertinent questions, and there are indications that it would not be feasible to use it alongside poetry in the teaching of Urhobo as a second language. However, Dr. Nancy Mack of the College of Liberal Arts, Wright State University, Ohio has, in her book *Teaching Grammar with Playful Poems*, published January 1, 2008, experimented Teaching Grammar with Poetry. It is therefore noted that while it may prove difficult to use grammar Translation to teach Urhobo through poetry, it is possible to teach Urhobo grammar through poetry, if this possibility is carefully explored. While there may seem to be a contradiction at this point, let it be noted that Dr Nancy Mack’s experiment is about the teaching of grammar with poetry. Grammar is only an aspect of language learning whereas Grammar translation method has to do with the teaching of language.
and not just its grammar. It has also been found that teaching Urhobo with the immersion method and poetry would be difficult to accomplish, given the fact that there is nowhere in Urhoboland at present, where the language has not been affected by other languages, especially English and pidgin. Yet there is a proviso. If the ambience is provided, the immersion method could be utilised and found to be very successful.

RECOMMENDATION

It is worthy of note and very commendable that Urhobo has now been integrated into the national curriculum as a teaching subject. For the objective of this integration to be achieved the following recommendations are made:

i. That Urhobo be taught as a second language (even in urhoboland) bearing in mind that this is the status it has acquired over the years;

ii. That Urhobo language should enjoy in Urhoboland the same status as the English language enjoys in Nigeria.

iii. Urhobo language should therefore be taught in the primary school as well as at both levels of the secondary school.

iv. There should be trained Urhobo language teachers.

v. The Urhobo language teacher should be versed in second language teaching methods;

vi. The Urhobo language Teacher should be a great dramatist, able to act out the words using the correct expressions and intonations of the language.

vii. Urhobo language laboratory should be provided in schools in Urhoboland;

viii. Now that there is no purely Urhobo village, an Urhobo Language village should be created to serve exclusively as a place for Urhobo Language Immersion.

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