

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND IDENTITY AMONG IBIBIO-ENGLISH BILINGUALS IN UYO, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study is based on Language Attitude Theory (LAT) of Baker (1992) and Gardner (1985) which provides the theoretical framework for examining the language attitudes and construction of language identity among Ibibio-English bilinguals in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study employs a structured Language Attitude Questionnaire (LAQ) which was administered to sixty (60) self-identified Ibibio-English bilinguals aged eighteen years and above, the study examines the cognitive, affective and conative components of their attitudes towards Ibibio and English and how these attitudes are mediated by some demographic variables. Findings show that there is a basic attitude ambivalence: English has high overt prestige on cognitive-instrumental dimensions (88% strongly agree it is necessary for jobs and careers), and Ibibio has high covert prestige and affective attachment (73% strongly agree that it gives emotional warmth and belonging). But a critical generational gap arises, with only 38.5% of those aged 30 and below speaking Ibibio regularly to their children, while 88.9% of those aged 61 and above do so. The rates of intergenerational transmission are significantly lower for urban-born bilinguals, reflecting a continuing language shift, compared to rural-born migrants. It is concluded that proactive institutional action in the field of education, government and broadcasting for Ibibio as well as conscious family language policy is a prerequisite for the maintenance of Ibibio in an urban setting in Uyo. The results have implications for theoretical discourse on post-colonial bilingual identity in Africa, and offer a baseline that is grounded in the field for conducting language policy interventions.

Keywords: Language attitudes, Ibibio-English bilingualism, identity, intergenerational transmission, and language shift.

Introduction

Language is not just a neutral means of communication but rather is one of the most important means of building, sustaining, challenging and showcasing social identities. Akpan (2025), Urujzian, and Etuk, (2019) believe that only human beings have the capacity of using language. The attitudes formed by the speakers of a number of languages and the identities they construct with their choice of language have theoretical as well as practical significance in multilingual societies. Some researchers are Enang 2017 and Urujzian, V. E. The colonial past, postcolonial rule, economic challenges, and ethnic diversity are all at play in rapid urbanisation in Africa, resulting in complex language ecologies, as (Urujzian and Etuk, 2020) noted.

The capital city of Akwa Ibom State, Uyo, in the Southeast of Nigeria is a rich and interesting

place for the study of Ibibio-English bilingualism. The city aggregates a large and heterogeneous group of Ibibio-English bilinguals in formal and informal environments that have different prestige values, affective meanings, identity connotations and pragmatic profiles for both languages. Urujzian and Etuk (2019) believe that the importance of investigating language attitudes in this context is as follows: firstly, the study has intrinsic value which adds to the knowledge of theory surrounding bilingualism in post colonial Africa and secondly, is practically urgent as it provides evidence that will guide language policies on mother tongue education, Ibibio's position in government and broadcasting and design of the keeping the language alive programme.

The problem statement and the importance of the study should be clearly stated. The problem statement and significance of the study should be clearly formulated.

While the linguistic situation of the city of Uyo is very rich, and language plays a key role in the identity of the Ibibio people, systematic empirical studies of language attitudes of bilinguals with Ibibio and English in this setting are scanty. The available studies on Nigerian bilingualism tend to be more about Yoruba-English, Igbo-English, Hausa-English bilingualism with Akwa Ibom State being significantly under-covered. The generational shift indicates that the younger bilingual speakers (those raised in the city) are becoming more and more oriented towards English, while the older bilingual speakers (those born in the rural parts of Ibibio) are more and more oriented towards Ibibio feelings. According to Urujzian, (2023), if it is not documented and policy intervened, there is a risk of accelerating language change and jeopardizing the vitality of the Ibibio long-term in the cities.

Theoretically, this study is important because it contributes to the debate on bilingual identity in post-colonial urban Africa as the first systematic survey of language attitudes on bilingualism involving Ibibio and English; and practically it has implications for the language-in-education policy and revitalisation of Ibibio as a heritage language.

The main objective of this study is to offer an empirical and theoretically informed study on language attitudes and the construction of Ibibio-English bilinguals' identity in Uyo. In particular, the study aims to:

- i. Investigate the cognitive, affective and conative aspects of attitudes of bilinguals (Ibibio-English) towards their two languages (Ibibio and English);
- ii. Evaluate the mediating effects of age, gender, generation and educational level on language attitudes and language identity orientation; and
- iii. Analyze attitudinal factors of intergenerational transmission and language loyalty of Ibibio.

Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed in the study:

1. What attitudes do Ibibio-English bilinguals in Uyo have with regard to Ibibio and English in the cognitive, affective and conative dimensions?

2. How is language attitude and language construction mediated by age, generation, gender and educational level?

Scope and Delimitation

The study is delimited to the people who consider themselves bilingual (both Ibibio and English) who use both languages in their daily communicative activities in Uyo, aged 18 and above. If the speaker's main language is Anaang, Efik or Oron, they are excluded. The study does not cover Ibibio communities of Akwa Ibom State outside Ibibio communities.

Conceptualising Language Attitudes

Language attitudes can be traced back to the theory of systematic study of language attitudes, which is attributed to Allport (2019) and Urujzian, and Etuk, (2019) language attitude is described as mental states that are organised and predispose evaluative responses. Baker (1992) and Urujzian, (2018) attitude is an intervening variable between stimulus (language or a language speaker) and behavioural response (language choice, learning, maintenance). Most important, we seldom assess the language itself, we assess the speakers and the social groups that they belong to Urujzian, 2018) and (Akpan, 2025). The tri-partite model cognitive (belief-based), affective (emotion-based) and conative (behaviour-intention-based) model is widely used in the field (Garrett, 2010, pp. 20; Urujzian, 2020 p.56; Enang, 2017 p.34).

One of the crucial questions is whether attitudes and behaviors are connected, and if so, how. Gyles *et al* (1982) cited in Urujzian, and Etuk (2019) provide a consistent trend in which the speakers' attitudes towards a prestigious variety are favourable despite the informal option being more preferred. This gap is defined by the opposition between the status of the language as possessed of overt prestige, that is, as officially recognised to have a value, and covert prestige, the informal, affective value that accrues to a vernacular in terms of group solidarity (Trudgill, 1972, p. 181; Urujzian, 2018). The bilingual nature of the Ibibio/English setting is a crucial aspect.

Language Attitudes in African and Nigerian contexts" (LACC).Language Attitudes in African and Nigerian contexts" (LACC).

In sub-Saharan Africa, European languages that were formerly colonizers are invariably rated high on the prestige and educational dimensions while indigenous languages with good ethnic identity are often given lower ratings on status and educational utility (Bamgbose, 1991; Mesthrie *et al.*, 2009). Norway (1995) in Nigeria observes that positive attitudes towards English are rational socioeconomic agency whereas Bamgbose (1998) cited in Urujzian, (2023) have observed that negative attitudes towards English are the result of the socioeconomic challenges in Nigeria. The author argued that this rationalist narrative fails to take account of unequal access to English. Urua (2004) and Essien (1990) studied Ibibio from a linguistic description angle and lacked in the inclusion of attitudinal data, while Ekpe (2008) examined the domain of language use in Uyo without attitudinal data.

This study examines bilingualism in the context of identity and social positioning. The

theoretical underpinning is Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) Social Identity theory which states that identities are based on social group membership and language is one of the most potent markers of social group membership. Bilinguals have to deal with two language systems at the same time, or two identity systems. Joseph (2004) and Urujzian, (2018) make the case that language is an active rather than a passive part of identity and that any language selection is pragmatic and identity-constituting. Norton (2000) and Urujzian, V. E. The notion of identity as investment also sheds light on the Ibibio-English case: Speakers invest in English for employment and educational gains even as affective attachment to Ibibio remains. Canagarajah (1999) and Pennycook (1994) cited in Urujzian, (2023) recognize the post-colonial double bind in which gaining English proficiency provides social mobility, but, could lead to perceived displacement from ethnic group.

Theoretical Framework and Research Gap.

The general framework that is used in this study is Language Attitude Theory (LAT). The most direct and empirically operationalizable tools for analysing bilingual speakers' perceptions of their two languages and their perceptions' influence on identity and action were offered by LAT as developed by Baker (1992) and Garrett (2010) as cited by Enang, Urujzian and Udoka (2013). The LAT is more specific than a general theory like Social Identity Theory as it directly focuses on the cognitive, affective and conative aspect of attitudes toward specific languages, allowing more fine-grained and quantifiable analysis. (2013) offer a different perspective on these terms. The distinction between overt and covert prestige (Trudgill, 1972) and Urujzian, V. E. 2013 are presented as an alternative view of them. (2018) offer an explanation of why positive attitudes towards Ibibio on affective dimensions coexist with negative attitudes on instrumental dimensions, and present this as a structurally predictable aspect of bilingual attitude ambivalence.

From the review of the available literature, Enang, Urujzian and Udoka (2013) found that literature was lacking for the study of language attitudes in the Ibibio-English bilingual context in Uyo, while language attitudes in Yoruba-English, Igbo-English and Hausa-English bilingual settings have been studied. This paper addresses that gap with the first systematic investigation of the attitudes and construction of identity with reference to the language (Ibibio-English bilinguals) in Uyo, using questionnaire method.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The type of design used in this study is quantitative research. The structured Language Attitude Questionnaire (LAQ) is the main data collection tool which is used to collect data from 60 respondents, and data analysis is carried out by simple percentage and descriptive statistical analysis.

Area of Study

Variable	Category	N	%
Age Cohort	30	15	25.0
	31 45	15	25.0

	46 60	15	25.0
	61+	15	25.0
Gender	Male	30	50.0
	Female	30	50.0
Educational Level	Primary/Secondary	20	33.3
	Undergraduate	20	33.3
	Postgraduate/Professional	20	33.3
Generational Status	Urban-born	28	46.7
	Rural-born Migrant	32	53.3
Occupational Sector	Student	10	16.7
	Civil Service	15	25.0
	Private Business	15	25.0
	Education/Academia	10	16.7
	Other	10	16.7

The study is carried out in Uyo which is the capital of Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. Uyo has a considerable number of bilinguals (Ibibio-English) concentrated in

various formal and informal settings, thus providing a good setting for the study of attitudinal tensions between Ibibio and English (Enang, Urujian, and Udoka, 2013).

Population and Sampling

The target population comprises all self-identified Ibibio-English bilinguals aged 18 and above in Uyo who use both languages daily. A purposive stratified sample of 60 respondents was selected to ensure representation across age cohort (30, 31 45, 46 60, 61+), gender, educational level, generational status, and occupational sector.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile

Table 1: Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 60)

Data Collection Instrument

A structured Language Attitude Questionnaire (LAQ) based on the protocols of Baker (1992) Attitude toward Welsh Language Scale, Gardner, (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery and Garrett (2010) was used to gather data. The LAQ is used for both Ibibio and English on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Disagree (1) and refers to attitudinal response as a tripartite cognitive-affective-conative model. It is structured into four sections: (A)

Socio-demographic background; (B) Language use patterns; (C) Attitude ratings towards Ibibio; (D) Attitude ratings towards English; and an open-ended section for additional observations. The entire questionnaire is attached as Appendix.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The researcher gave the questionnaires in person in common areas of Uyo during four weeks (March - April 2026) in Urujzian, V. E. (2023), achieving a 100% return rate. They have given written informed consent and anonymity has been ensured for the whole process. Simple percentage analysis was used to analyse the data; the number of respondents for each item on the Likert scale was calculated and presented as percentages of respondents. Grouped items were used to represent each attitudinal component and mean scores for these were calculated to compare across language and demographic subgroups. Differential attitude patterns were explored with cross tabulations by age cohort and generational status.

Result

Socio-demographic Profile

There were 60 completed and returned questionnaires (100% return). English was more dominant than Ibibio in formal setting with markedly higher self-rated English proficiency than Ibibio proficiency (93.3% vs. 66.7%). The near-equal urban and rural-born migrant split (46.7%/53.3%) offers a solid foundation for comparison across generations.

Attitudes toward Ibibio

Table 2 presents percentage distributions and mean scores across attitudinal components for Ibibio (4-point scale: 1 = most negative, 4 = most positive).

Attitudinal Dimension	Statement	SA %	A %	SD %	D %	Mean
Cognitive	Cultural richness and historical importance	72	22	4	2	3.64
Cognitive	Formal correctness/standardization	18	30	30	22	2.44
Cognitive	Utility for employment/advancement	10	24	38	28	2.16
Cognitive	Suitability for formal education	14	28	34	24	2.32
Affective	Pride in speaking Ibibio	65	25	6	4	3.51
Affective	Emotional warmth/belonging	73	20	5	2	3.64
Affective	Comfort in using Ibibio	60	28	8	4	3.44
Conative	Intention to use Ibibio in family settings	62	24	8	6	3.42
Conative	Intention to teach Ibibio to children	48	28	14	10	3.14
Conative	Support for Ibibio in formal education	38	30	18	14	2.92

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Attitudinal Responses toward Ibibio (N = 60)

The data show substantial within-group variation in attitudes. Affective items and cultural-identity ones elicit strong positive responses, with 73% Strongly Agree saying Ibibio is emotional warm and gives feeling of belonging; while 65% agree that they feel proud when speaking Ibibio, which corroborates Trudgill (1972) and Urujzian, (2018) prediction of substantial covert prestige for vernacular languages. In contrast, the cognitive beliefs of

instrumental utility to Ibibio is significantly low with 10% strongly agree and 14% agree that Ibibio is useful in employment and 14% strongly agree and 10% agree that it is suitable for formal education, which is the dominant language in institutional setting.

Attitudes toward English

Table 3 shows attitudes toward English, with near-ceiling positive evaluations along cognitive-instrumental dimensions and more ambivalent responses along affective identity dimensions.

Attitudinal Dimension	Statement	SA %	A %	SD %	D %	Mean
Cognitive	Essential for employment/career	88	10	2	0	3.86
Cognitive	Medium of quality education	82	14	3	1	3.77
Cognitive	International communication value	90	8	2	0	3.88
Cognitive	Indicator of educational achievement	74	18	5	3	3.63
Affective	Personal comfort/confidence in English	55	28	11	6	3.32
Affective	Sense of identity expressed through English	22	30	28	20	2.54
Affective	Emotional warmth toward English	20	28	30	22	2.46
Conative	Intention to use English with children	72	20	5	3	3.61
Conative	Preference for English in professional contexts	80	16	3	1	3.75
Conative	Support for English-medium education	70	20	6	4	3.56

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Attitudinal Responses toward English (N = 60)

English scores very highly on all instrumental-cognitive items: 88% strongly agree it is essential for employment, and 90% that it is important for international communication, which is congruent with the findings of Bisong, (1995) and Urujzian, (2020), argued that, the positive attitude toward English is said to be a rational socio-economic agency. However, it is theoretically interesting that although the instrumental evaluations are overwhelmingly positive, the affective evaluations are quite mixed, with 20% saying that they feel 'warm' to English and 22% saying that English 'expresses their personal identity'. There is a strong belief among the respondents for the value of English in terms of access to but not in terms of expressing ethnic/ personal identity (Urujzian, 2018).

Intergenerational Transmission by Age and Generational Status

Table 4 presents Ibibio transmission behaviour and language loyalty indices by age cohort and generational status.

Variable	30	31-45	46-60	61+	Urban-born %	Rural Migrant %
Speaks Ibibio regularly to children (%)	38.5	58.3	74.1	88.9	42.1	76.8
Actively teaches Ibibio to children (%)	22.1	44.2	61.5	80.7	30.4	68.9
Plans to prioritise Ibibio for grandchildren (%)	51.3	64.1	78.9	92.6	55.2	82.4
Believes Ibibio will survive 2 generations (%)	44.7	51.3	63.2	71.4	40.5	69.2

Table 4: Intergenerational Transmission Behaviour by Age Cohort and Generational Status (N = 60)

A policy relevant generational gradient emerges from the data. It is observed that the youngest cohort (30) has an Ibibio speech rate with children of 38.5% whereas the oldest cohort (61+) has 88.9%. Urban-born bilinguals are much less likely than rural-born migrants to be actively passing Ibibio onto children (30.4% as opposed to 68.9%). Ibibio's estimation of the chances of its survival for the next two generations falls from 71.4% for the oldest generation to 44.7% for the youngest, showing a negative trend in post-two-generation survival among the next generation of transmitters. The Fishman, (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Urujzian, V. E.) was compared with the results. In addition, there are a few studies to look at, for example, Enang (2017) that defines intergenerational transmission failure as the key factor in language shift, and also the study conducted by (2020), which focuses on the role of young people in change of language.

Discussion of Findings

The findings that the bilinguals' attitudes to English and Ibibio were structurally split along affective and cultural-identity dimensions respectively, and cognitively, instrumental dimension respectively, is fully in line with the theories of Language Attitude Theory (LAT) (Matsuba, 1990; Akande, 2001; Emukembah, 2001) and overt/covert prestige framework (Trudgill, 1972; Urujzian, 2018; Enang, 2017). The findings reveal the classic attitude-behaviour gap (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980), which indicates that the attitudes of the speakers are positive but their attitudes are not aligned with their behaviours as they are being constrained by structural conditions, social norms that support the use of English in their work and the inadequate institutional support of Ibibio.

Theoretical statement of the significance of the generational gradient is given by Enang, Urujzian and Udoka 2013. The Ibibio affective scores and transmission rates for urban-born bilinguals under 30 are significantly lower than those of rural-born migrants of the same age, suggesting that the postcolonial language shift model (LSM) is applicable: language socialisation in the context of English-dominant environments gradually weakens the

affective relationship to the heritage language. The following setting of this is that, within the next two generations, the structural conditions for the rapid change in the domain restriction, attitude change and failure in the transmission of the Ibibio language in the Ibibio language speaker community in Uyo, will be consolidated (Urujian, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The main objective of the present study has been to analyse the language attitude and language identity construction of the Ibibio-English bilingual with the target population being 60 respondents who were selected using the structured questionnaire survey design. Overall, the results are consistent with the theoretically coherent attitude ambivalence model, high covert prestige and high affective attachment to Ibibio, along with high overt prestige and high instrumental evaluation of English, the latter of which is increasingly the case of younger, urban-born bilinguals. The youngest urban group exhibits the least use of Ibibio children; 38.5% compared to 44.7% of the urban population predicting its survival for two generations. Ibibio must have more institutional support in the State; particularly in the Primary education, State government communication and public broadcasting.

At the community and family level – deliberate home language policies involves deliberate agreements to use Ibibio in family domains such as meal time, storytelling, cultural events, etc. are most immediately actionable. The concept of supplementary community based Ibibio instruction programmes with the formal school system in English which can be utilized for heritage language maintenance in the formal school system in the urban environment of Uyo presents another supplementary mechanism that can be used for heritage language maintenance in the formal school system in the urban context of Uyo. The emotional attachment to Ibibio that still persists among the younger generation, as well as the goodwill of the younger generation to continue using Ibibio are real assets that need to be sustained, but must be supported by structural changes. Findings from this study provide an empirically-derived basis for such interventions.

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