

**LANGUAGES USED IN THE HAREM A CASE STUDY OF MR OSARO OBAZEE  
HOUSEHOLD**

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**BENIN CITY**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS, FACULTY OF  
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**OCTOBER, 2025**

**APPROVAL PAGE**

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## **PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATION**

I, IDEHEN NETETE GLORY with matriculation number ART2201047, declare that this work titled; LANGUAGE USE IN THE HAREM A CASE STUDY OF MR OSARO OBAZEE HOUSEHOLD has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test so does not violate copyright regulation

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**IDEHEN NETETE GLORY**

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to God Almighty, my Greatest Counsellor and Source of strength, whose guidance and grace have carried me through the completion of my programme .I also dedicate it to the memory of my beloved late grandmother, whose love, support, and encouragement sustained me during my most difficult times in school, though she could not live to witness this accomplishment. Her influence will forever remain a part of my journey

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## **ABSTRACT**

Polygamous households create unique communicative environments where language functions as a medium for expressing power, negotiating relationships, and reinforcing or challenging social order. This study examines patterns of language use among the four wives in the harem of Mr. Osaro Obaze in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The central problem addressed is the lack of sociolinguistic studies on domestic communication in Nigerian polygamous families, despite their prevalence. The main aim is to explore how language reflects hierarchy, rivalry, and cooperation in a multilingual family context. The research is guided by Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication (THE SPEAKING MODEL), which provides a framework for analyzing how speech events and communicative practices function within cultural settings. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews, and audio recordings of daily interactions and also spending time with the family. Findings reveal forty categories of language use, ranging from directive and competitive speech to collaborative and affectionate communication. The senior wife receives linguistic deference through honorifics, while strategic code-switching between Edo, Nigerian Pidgin English, and Standard English serves as a tool for inclusion, exclusion, and conflict negotiation. The study concludes that language in the harem is both a marker of hierarchy and a resource for managing relationships. It recommends further comparative research on language and gender in African polygamous households.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Language is more than a medium of communication; it is a social tool that reflects power relations, identity, culture, and interpersonal dynamics ( Nowak et al., 2001). Within the domestic setting particularly in polygynous households language becomes a powerful mechanism for expressing authority, negotiation, solidarity, rivalry, and hierarchy (Heyes et al., 2000). The dynamics in a harem, consisting of multiple wives , offer a rich sociolinguistic environment where speech patterns, choice of words, tone, and non-verbal communication reveal much about the relationships within the household (Pepperberg et al., 2000).

The concept of the harem traditionally referring to the private space of a household reserved for women extends metaphorically to any setting where multiple wives exist under one male authority (Assmann., 2003) . In such environments, linguistic practices often reflect subtle (and sometimes overt) power relations and social negotiations (Eyre.,2007) . The language employed within harems often includes forms of politeness, sarcasm, indirectness, euphemisms, code-switching, and unique registers that may not be fully understood by outsiders (Gosselin.,2007).

In Nigeria we have 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages ,Among those groups, various marital practices are observed, including polygamy (harem)which is often associated with certain cultural and religious traditions (Alabi., 2020). Most languages in Nigeria practice haram, some of the languages are igbo, yoruba, Fulani, ijew, Edo, isoko etc . But this study will be focusing on Edo language benin precisely,a case study of Mr Osaro obaze's household (harem) (Coleman., 2000).This study investigates the language used in the harem of Mr. Osaro Obaze's family. It explores how women and wives interact linguistically, how language reflects the household's social structure, and the ways language is used to express power, alliance, and conflict.

Mr. Obaze lives in a large compound with four wives, each of whom occupies a different part of the household but shares common spaces for family and communal interactions. While polygamy is legally permitted in certain cultures and religions, the way Mr. Obaze conducts his -

family affairs has drawn attention from both neighbors and community leaders, especially due to accusations that he practices haram within his home. This includes behaviors considered morally and religiously inappropriate, such as neglect, favoritism, and questionable financial dealings that impact his wives and children (Gosselin., 2007).Mr. Osaro Obazee's home is a complex environment defined by multiple relationships, varying educational and economic backgrounds, and a significant imbalance in the treatment of wives and children (Ekong., 2005). While the presence of four wives is not in itself unusual in certain cultural contexts, the way Mr. Obaze handles his responsibilities has raised moral and ethical concerns. Accusations of haram behavior stem not from the structure of his household, but from the lack of equity, love, and fairness in its day-to-day management. For a polygamous home to thrive, it requires wisdom, patience, justice, and respect qualities that Mr. Obaze has, unfortunately, been accused of lacking (Alabi., 2020).

### **1.1BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

Language is not merely a means of communication; it is a social instrument through which individuals construct identity, establish relationships, and negotiate power within specific cultural contexts. In traditional societies like that of the Benin Kingdom in southern Nigeria, language has historically played a central role in shaping the dynamics of various social institutions, including the harem. Within such spaces reserved primarily for the wives, concubines, and female attendants of titled chiefs and influential men language use is both rich and complex, reflecting the intricate social hierarchies and interpersonal relationships that define life in the harem.

In precolonial and postcolonial Benin, the harem was an important institution tied to the prestige and authority of powerful men such as community leaders, chiefs, and respected elders. One notable example is the harem of Mr. Osaro Obaze, a prominent figure within his local community. His household, like those of other well-regarded men in Benin society, was structured not only around social influence and economic standing but also around the private social world of his multiple wives and concubines. These women coexisted in a polygynous setting where language became a vital means of negotiating daily life, asserting identity, managing conflict, building alliances, emphasizes age, seniority, gender roles, and status in everyday interactions and maintaining social boundaries.Despite their cultural importance, the

voices and linguistic practices of women in such domestic institutions have often been marginalized in historical and linguistic scholarship. Yet, the harem offers a rich linguistic environment in which unique forms of communication including coded language, proverbs, indirect speech, silence, and respectful address forms emerge. These linguistic strategies are deeply embedded in Benin culture, which

This study seeks to explore the language used in the harem, with a specific focus on the wives and concubines of Mr. Osaro Obazee. It aims to uncover the linguistic strategies employed within the harem space, examine how language reflects the power dynamics among women of different ranks, and highlight the cultural values and norms encoded in their speech patterns. By doing so, the research contributes to the broader understanding of gendered language use in African traditional societies and sheds light on an understudied aspect of Benin sociolinguistic history.

## **1.2 LOCATION OF LANGUAGES AND SPEAKER**

This study is situated in Edo State, Nigeria, specifically in Benin City where Mr. Osaro Obaze and his extended family reside. The Obaze family is a polygamous household with multiple wives. The primary languages spoken within the household include Edo (Bini), Nigerian Pidgin English, and occasionally Standard English. Each of these languages carries sociocultural meanings and is used selectively depending on context, speaker, and intent. The wives are mostly native Edo speakers, with varying degrees of fluency in Pidgin and English.

## **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite the increasing scholarly attention to gender and language, little work has been done on language use within polygynous families in contemporary Nigerian society, especially at the micro-level of households. Much of the existing literature focuses on public discourse or generalized gendered language use, with less focus on domestic power dynamics. The harem, as a microcosm of society, contains rich linguistic interactions that reflect both social order and resistance. However, there is a paucity of empirical research documenting the nuanced language use among wives and concubines within Nigerian polygynous settings. This gap in the literature raises key questions: How is language used to assert power or submission? How do women in

such settings navigate relationships linguistically? What role does culture play in shaping these language practices?

#### **1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the patterns, styles, and functions of language use within the harem of Mr. Osaro Obaze's family. It seeks to understand how language is used to express power, form alliances, assert identity, and manage conflict among wives. The study also intends to highlight how tradition, culture, and social status influence linguistic choices in the household.

#### **1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study is significant as it contributes to sociolinguistic and anthropological literature on language use in domestic and traditional African settings. It provides a focused look into the private linguistic world of polygynous families, particularly in Edo State. The research will benefit linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, and students interested in gendered communication, African family systems, and language and power. The scope of the study is limited to the interactions within Mr. Osaro Obaze's family harem. It concentrates on the wives and immediate domestic environment, excluding the broader extended family or community.

#### **1.6 AIMS**

The study aims to explore the linguistic behavior within a polygynous household (harem).

##### **1.6.1 OBJECTIVES**

The specific objectives are:

- To identify the types of language and speech patterns used in Mr. Osaro Obaze's harem.
- To analyze how language is used to reflect social hierarchy, intimacy, rivalry, and negotiation.
- To examine the influence of tradition and culture on the linguistic choices of wives
- To explore the role of multilingualism and code-switching in everyday interactions in the household.

## **1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of language are commonly used among the wives in Mr. Osaro Obaze's family?
2. How does language reflect social status and power dynamics within the harem?
3. What cultural factors influence the choice of language or speech style in the household?
4. How do linguistic strategies help in maintaining or disrupting harmony among household members?

## **1.8 METHODOLOGY**

This research will employ a qualitative approach using ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods.

Data will be collected through:

Participant observation: Spending time within the household to observe real-life conversations and interactions.

Interviews: Conducting semi-structured interviews with the wives possibly other household members.

Audio recordings: With consent, natural conversations will be recorded to analyze speech patterns, code-switching, and pragmatic strategies.

The data will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically, focusing on language functions, speech acts, and social meaning.

### **1.8.1 METAL DATA**

#### **Brief History of Mr. Osaro Obaze and His Household**

Mr. Osaro Obaze was born into a large polygamous home, he hails from Ugbogio, in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. His father had eight wives, but Sadly, he lost his father at a very young age leaving him without proper parental guidance. After this loss, his aunty raised him, which explains why he was unable to complete his education, even though he made efforts to return to school later on. Without a father figure, he faced many challenges and could not

succeed academically. To survive, young Mr Osaro took on small jobs, such as carrying loads in the market, to make ends meet. Over time, he learned a trade (shoemaking) which became his lifelong occupation. For over 30 years, he used this skill to provide for his family, supporting both his wives and children.

Following the example of his father, who had eight wives, Mr Osaro chose to marry four wives. His decision was also shaped by loneliness; having lost his father, sister, and lacking attention from his mother, he longed for companionship and a large family. This desire gave rise to his idea of marrying multiple wives and raising many children.

#### Brief history of how He Met His Wives

\* Mrs. Esther Osaretin Obazee (his first wife ) came from the village to Benin City to learn tailoring. While learning her trade, she also worked as a house help for Mr. Obaze's aunty. It was during this period that she met Mr. Obazee. Their acquaintance soon developed into marriage. Their union was fruitful, as she gave birth to five children.

\* Mrs Otabor Loveth Obazee was Osaro's first love. However, she traveled abroad before they could marry. When she returned, she had a child from another man. Despite this, Mr Osaro's love for her remained strong, and he accepted her as his wife. Together, they had five more children, and with the one she already had, she became the mother of six children in total.

\* Mr. Obazee met his third wife, Mrs. Irene Joy Obazee , when he relocated his shop from its former site to a new place. She stood out to him because of her education, good character, and the way she carried herself. Being educated, she played a key role in guiding and properly educating their children, ensuring they had a strong foundation. She became the mother of four children, and she is often regarded as one of the more influential wives due to her wisdom and knowledge.

\* The youngest and last wife, Mrs. Ogheneyoma Mercy Obazee, came into Mr. Obaze's life through a mutual friend who introduced them. He was drawn to her simplicity and lively personality, finding her both interesting and caring. Since Mr. Obaze had a passion for raising a large family, he saw her as a blessing and welcomed her into the household. She later gave birth

to two children, adding to the growth and unity of the family. Her position as the youngest wife often made her a bridge between the senior wives and the younger ones.

### **1.8.2 BRIEF HISTORY ABOUT THE WIVES**

\* Mrs. Osaretin Esther Ọbazẹ is the first wife of Mr. Osaro Obaze and the matriarch of the household. A devoted mother of five, she also plays the role of a mother to the other wives. By profession, she is a skilled tailor whose handiwork has contributed to the family's stability. A dedicated Christian, she provides both moral and spiritual guidance, balancing her roles as wife, mother, and homemaker with dignity and patience.

\* The second wife, Mrs. Loveth Otabor Ọbazẹ, is a hardworking woman known for her skill in catering. She owns and manages a restaurant, which has made her an industrious contributor to the family's welfare. A mother of five children within the marriage and one child outside it, she carries the responsibility of raising a large family despite not having formal education. Her dedication to her trade and her resilience in managing family life mark her as a strong and resourceful wife.

\* The third wife, Mrs. Irene Joy Ọbazẹ , stands out as an educated woman and a teacher by profession. She is the mother of four children and a committed Christian, known for her strong faith and moral values. Her education and background in teaching bring a sense of structure, discipline, lightenment to the household. She is respected not only for her role as a mother but also for her contributions to nurturing the younger generation both at home and in the classroom

\* Mrs. Ogheneyoma Mercy Ọbazẹ , the youngest wife of Mrs. Mercy, is a devoted Christian and mother of two. A skilled hairstylist, she combines her profession with her family duties. Despite her youth, she is respected for her humility, energy, and the harmony she brings to the household.

### **1.8.3 FAMILY ALBUM**



**Mr Osaro Obazee**

**SOURCE.**

Williams Obazee (Mr Osaro Obazee's son)

**DATE**

September 14th 2025



**Mrs Esther Osaretin Qbazee (first wife)**

**SOURCE.**

Williams Qbazee (son)

**DATE.**

September 14th 2025.



**Mrs Otabor Loveth Qbazee (second wife)**

**SOURCE**

Deborah Qbazee (daughter)

**DATE**

September 16th 2025



**Mrs Irene Joy Q̄baz̄e(third wife)  
Q̄baz̄e (forth wife)**

Williams Q̄baz̄e ( step son)

**DATE.**

September 15 2025.



**Mrs ogheneyoma mercy SOURCE.**

Williams Q̄baz̄e (step son)

**DATE**

September 17th 2025

**Mr Osaro Obazee's 17 children**

**SOURCE**

Williams Obazee and Deborah Obazee

**DATE**

September 15 and 16 2025



## **1.9 SUMMARY**

Chapter One of the study introduces the sociolinguistic investigation into the language used within the harem of Mr. Osaro Obaze, a polygynous household located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. It explores how language functions as a tool for communication, power negotiation, identity construction, and relationship management among the wives of Mr. Obaze. The chapter highlights the complex interpersonal dynamics shaped by education, status, favoritism, and cultural expectations in the home, illustrating how these factors influence speech patterns and communication styles.

The study is situated within the context of Edo culture, where polygamy is culturally accepted, and emphasizes the under-explored linguistic practices among co-wives in such domestic settings. It outlines the significance of language in reflecting social hierarchy, rivalry, intimacy, and conflict, and addresses the lack of research in this area. The chapter also presents the research questions, objectives, and methodology, which include participant observation, interviews, and audio recordings. Overall, Chapter One establishes the foundation for a detailed exploration of gendered language use in a traditional African household.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to the study of language use in polygamous households, with particular emphasis on harem dynamics and multilingual family structures. The review is structured to examine the conceptual foundations of language variation in domestic settings, survey previous empirical studies on language practices in polygamous families, and identify the specific gaps that this study of Mr. Osaro Obaze's household aims to address. Language use in polygamous households represents a complex sociolinguistic phenomenon that intersects with issues of power dynamics, identity construction, social hierarchy, and cultural preservation. The harem system, as a form of polygamous arrangement, creates unique linguistic environments where multiple languages, dialects, and registers coexist and interact in intricate ways (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1965). Understanding these linguistic patterns requires examination of both the structural aspects of language use and the social functions that different linguistic choices serve within the household context.

The significance of studying language in such settings extends beyond mere descriptive linguistics to encompass broader questions about language maintenance, shift, and the role of domestic domains in shaping linguistic practices. As Spolsky (2009) notes, the family domain serves as a crucial site for language transmission and maintenance, making it essential to understand how polygamous family structures influence these processes.

#### **2.2 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

##### **2.2.1 Theoretical Framework: Domain Analysis and Diglossia**

The theoretical foundation for understanding language use in polygamous households draws heavily from Fishman's (1965, 1972) domain analysis and Ferguson's (1959) concept of diglossia. Domain analysis provides a framework for examining how different languages or language varieties are distributed across various social contexts, participants, and topics within a speech community. In the context of a harem or polygamous household, domains can be conceptualized as different social spaces and relationships: wife-husband interactions, co-wife relationships,

mother-child communication, and interactions with domestic staff or visitors. Ferguson's (1959) diglossia, originally describing the functional distribution of high and low varieties of the same language, has been extended by scholars like Fishman (1967) to include situations involving different languages altogether. This extended diglossia is particularly relevant to multilingual polygamous households where different languages may serve distinct social functions. Fasold (1984) further elaborated on these concepts, emphasizing how social factors such as formality, intimacy, and power relationships influence language choice decisions.

### **2.2.2 LANGUAGES CHOICE AND CODE-SWITCHING IN MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES**

The phenomenon of code-switching, defined by Myers-Scotton (1993) as the alternation between two or more languages within a single conversation or utterance, is central to understanding language dynamics in multilingual households. Grosjean (1982, 2010) emphasizes that code-switching in family settings serves multiple functions: it can mark solidarity, exclude certain participants, express particular emotions, or fulfill referential needs when one language lacks specific vocabulary. In polygamous households, code-switching takes on additional dimensions related to the complex social hierarchies and relationships present. Auer (1984, 1995) distinguishes between situational and conversational code-switching, both of which are relevant to understanding how wives, children, and other household members navigate linguistic choices in different contexts within the same domestic space.

### **2.2.3 POWER DYNAMICS AND LANGUAGE USE**

Language use in polygamous households cannot be divorced from questions of power and social hierarchy. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital provides insight into how different languages or varieties carry different social values within the household context. The husband's linguistic preferences may carry particular weight in determining the household's linguistic ecology, while individual wives may use language as a means of asserting identity or solidarity with their children. Gal (1979) and Irvine (1989) have demonstrated how language choice can serve as a form of resistance or accommodation to power structures. In polygamous households, these dynamics may manifest in subtle ways, with different wives using language strategically to navigate their positions within the household hierarchy.

## **2.2.4 LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION IN COMPLEX FAMILY STRUCTURES**

Language socialization theory, as developed by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) and further elaborated by Garrett and Baquedano-López (2002), examines how individuals acquire linguistic and cultural competence through participation in social practices. In polygamous households, children are socialized into multiple linguistic systems simultaneously, creating unique patterns of language acquisition and use. The presence of multiple mother figures, each potentially bringing different linguistic repertoires, creates a complex socialization environment. Zentella (1997) and García (2009) have shown how children in multilingual families develop sophisticated metalinguistic awareness and strategic competence in managing multiple languages.

## **2.3 PREVIOUS STUDIES Studies**

### **2.3.1 STUDIES ON LANGUAGE USE IN POLYGAMOUS FAMILIES**

Research specifically focused on language use in polygamous households remains limited, though several studies provide relevant insights. Al-Khatib (2001) conducted a sociolinguistic study of Bedouin communities in Jordan, examining language use patterns in extended family structures that included polygamous arrangements. The study found that Arabic varieties were distributed according to gender, age, and social context, with Modern Standard Arabic serving formal functions while local dialects dominated intimate family interactions. Similarly, Holes (1987) examined language use in traditional Gulf families, noting that polygamous households often exhibited more complex patterns of diglossia than monogamous ones, particularly when wives came from different regional or social backgrounds. The study documented how children in such families developed more extensive linguistic repertoires but also faced greater challenges in language maintenance across generations. Abdel-Jawad (1987) investigated urban Palestinian families and found that polygamous households showed different patterns of language shift compared to monogamous families. The study suggested that the presence of multiple wives could either accelerate or decelerate language shift, depending on the linguistic backgrounds of the wives and the husband's language preferences.

### **2.3.2 WEST AFRICAN MULTILINGUAL HOUSEHOLD STUDIES**

Several studies from West Africa provide relevant context for understanding language dynamics in Nigerian polygamous households. Bamgbose (1991, 2000) examined multilingualism in Nigerian families, noting the complex interplay between indigenous languages, Nigerian Pidgin English, and Standard English. While not specifically focused on polygamous families, Bamgbose's work highlighted how different family members often serve as linguistic gatekeepers for different languages. Adegbija (1994) studied language use in Yoruba polygamous families in southwestern Nigeria, documenting how wives from different ethnic backgrounds contributed to the linguistic diversity of households. The study found that children in such families often became multilingual brokers, mediating communication between family members with different linguistic competencies. Igboanusi (2002) examined the role of English in Nigerian multilingual families, finding that educated polygamous families showed particular patterns of language distribution, with English often serving as a lingua franca among co-wives from different ethnic backgrounds while indigenous languages were maintained for cultural transmission to children.

### **2.3.4 GENDER AND LANGUAGE IN PATRIARCHAL FAMILY STRUCTURE**

Research on gender and language use in patriarchal family structures provides additional context for understanding harem dynamics. Tannen (1990, 1994) examined how gender influences conversational styles and language use patterns within families, though her work focused primarily on Western, monogamous contexts. More relevant to the present study, Sadiqi (2003) investigated women's language use in North African Muslim families, examining how Islamic family structures influence linguistic practices. The study found that women often maintained distinct linguistic repertoires that served both public and private functions, with code-switching serving as a means of negotiating different social identities. Haeri (2003) studied language and gender in Arab societies, documenting how women's linguistic practices in traditional family structures often differed significantly from their public language use. The study highlighted the importance of understanding domestic linguistic practices as distinct from public linguistic behavior.

### **2.3.5 LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SHIFT IN IMMIGRANT AND SHIFT IN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES**

While not directly comparable, studies of language maintenance in immigrant communities provide insights into how multilingual families manage linguistic diversity. Fishman (1991, 2001) documented how family language policies influence intergenerational language transmission, findings that are relevant to understanding how polygamous families might develop strategies for maintaining multiple languages. Curdt-Christiansen (2009, 2013) examined family language policy in Chinese immigrant families, demonstrating how parental attitudes and practices significantly influence children's linguistic development. The study's findings about the role of mothers as language socializers are particularly relevant to understanding how multiple wives might influence linguistic practices in polygamous households. Schwartz (2008) studied language use in multilingual Jewish families, documenting how religious and cultural considerations interact with practical language needs. The study's attention to the role of religious practices in shaping language use patterns provides insight into how Islamic practices might influence language use in Muslim polygamous households.

### **2.3.6 LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN COMPLEX SOCIAL STRUCTURES**

Research on language and identity formation in complex social structures provides additional theoretical grounding for the present study. Norton (2000, 2013) examined how language learners negotiate identity through linguistic practices, while Bucholtz and Hall (2005) developed a framework for understanding how identity is constructed through linguistic performance. In the context of polygamous households, each wife may use language as a means of constructing and maintaining distinct identities while also participating in shared household linguistic practices. Block (2007) and Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) have shown how multilingual individuals strategically employ different languages to index different aspects of their identities.

### **2.3.7 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO STUDYING DOMESTIC LANGUAGE USE**

Previous research on domestic language use has employed various methodological approaches, each with particular strengths and limitations. Ethnographic approaches, as exemplified by Heath (1983) and Zentella (1997), provide rich, contextual data about language use patterns but require extensive fieldwork and may be limited in scope.

Survey-based studies, such as those conducted by Li Wei (1994) and Clyne (2003), allow for broader generalizations but may miss subtle patterns of language use. Mixed-method approaches, combining ethnographic observation with quantitative measures, have proven particularly effective for understanding complex linguistic phenomena in family settings (King and Fogle, 2006; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009).

## **2.4 CONCERN OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

### **2.4.1 RESEARCH GAPS IDENTIFIED**

Despite the substantial body of literature on multilingualism, family language use, and sociolinguistics, several significant gaps remain in our understanding of language use in polygamous households, particularly in the Nigerian context. First, while studies have examined language use in West African multilingual families (Bamgbose, 1991; Adegbija, 1994), none have provided detailed ethnographic analysis of language use specifically within polygamous household structures. Second, existing research on polygamous families has often focused on social, economic, or psychological aspects (Jankowiak, Sudakov, and Wilreker, 2005; Al-Krenawi, 2012) while largely overlooking the linguistic dimensions of these family structures. The few studies that have touched on language use in polygamous contexts have been primarily descriptive rather than analytical (Al-Khatib, 2001; Holes, 1987). Third, there is a notable absence of research examining how Islamic religious practices and beliefs influence language use patterns in Nigerian polygamous households. While studies have examined language and religion in other contexts (Sadiqi, 2003; Haeri, 2003), the specific intersection of Islamic practice and multilingualism in Nigerian polygamous families remains unexplored.

#### **2.4.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

This study of language use in Mr. Osaro Obaze's household aims to contribute to several theoretical areas within sociolinguistics. First, it will extend domain analysis theory by examining how polygamous family structures create unique linguistic domains that differ from those found in monogamous households. The presence of multiple wives, each with potentially different linguistic backgrounds, creates complex patterns of language distribution that challenge existing theoretical frameworks. Second, the study will contribute to our understanding of language socialization in complex family structures. By examining how children acquire and use language in a household with multiple mother figures, the research will provide insights into how language socialization processes adapt to non-nuclear family structures. Third, the study will add to the literature on language and identity by examining how individuals within polygamous households use language to construct and negotiate multiple, sometimes competing identities. The co-wives' linguistic practices, in particular, offer insights into how women use language to maintain individual identities while participating in shared household practices.

#### **2.4.3 EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Empirically, this study will provide the first detailed ethnographic account of language use in a specific Nigerian polygamous household, contributing to our understanding of how multilingualism functions in practice within such family structures. The research will document specific patterns of language choice, code-switching, and language socialization that have not been previously described in the literature. The study will also contribute comparative data for understanding how Nigerian multilingual practices differ from those documented in other African contexts. By focusing on a specific household over an extended period, the research will provide insights into the dynamic nature of family language practices and how they change over time in response to various internal and external factors.

#### **2.4.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

From a practical perspective, this study has implications for language planning and policy in Nigeria, particularly regarding the role of family domains in language maintenance and shift. Understanding how polygamous families manage linguistic diversity can inform policies aimed

at promoting multilingualism while ensuring effective communication within families and communities. The research also has implications for educational policy, particularly regarding how schools can better serve children from complex multilingual family backgrounds. By understanding the linguistic competencies that children from polygamous households bring to school, educators can develop more effective pedagogical approaches.

#### **2.4.5 CULTURE AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

This study addresses the cultural and social significance of language use in an important but understudied family structure. Polygamous households represent a significant portion of family structures in many parts of Nigeria, yet their linguistic practices have received little scholarly attention. Understanding these practices contributes to a more complete picture of Nigerian linguistic diversity and the role of family structures in shaping language use patterns. Furthermore, by examining language use in a polygamous household through a neutral, scholarly lens, this research contributes to broader conversations about family diversity and the importance of understanding different family structures on their own terms rather than through the lens of Western, monogamous family models.

#### **2.3.6 Research RESEARCH QUESTIONS EMERGING FROM LITERATURE REVIEW**

Based on the gaps identified in the existing literature, this study of Mr. Osaro Obaze's household will address several specific research questions:

1. How are different languages distributed across various domains within the polygamous household, and what factors influence these distribution patterns?
2. What role does code-switching play in managing relationships between co-wives, between wives and husband, and between parents and children?
3. How do children in the household acquire and use multiple languages, and what role do different mother figures play in their language socialization?
4. How do Islamic religious practices influence language choice and use patterns within the household?

5. What strategies do household members employ to maintain linguistic diversity while ensuring effective communication across different linguistic competencies?

6. How do external factors (community expectations, educational requirements, economic opportunities) influence internal household language practices?

These questions emerge directly from the gaps identified in the literature review and will guide the empirical investigation of language use in Mr. Osaro Obaze's household, ensuring that the study makes meaningful contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical knowledge of multilingualism in complex family structures.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that support the study on language use in the harem, specifically focusing on Mr. Osaro Obaze's household. The study adopts the Ethnography of Communication theory, developed by Dell Hymes , as its primary theoretical lens. This framework provides a systematic approach to understanding how language functions within specific cultural contexts and social settings. The chapter examines the core components of the theory, its application to the research context, and its relevance to understanding the complex linguistic dynamics within polygynous households .The Ethnography of Communication offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing speech events, speech acts, and communicative practices within their cultural and social contexts (Hymes, 1972). This theoretical approach is particularly suited to this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of how language is used, modified, and negotiated within the unique social structure of a harem household. By employing this framework, the study can explore not only what is said but also how, when, where, and why particular linguistic choices are made within this specific cultural setting.

#### **3.1 ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION (SPEAKING MODEL)**

The Ethnography of Communication is a research approach and theoretical framework that studies how language is used in real social and cultural contexts. Ethnography of Communication, as conceptualized by Dell Hymes (1974), represents a paradigm shift from traditional linguistic analysis to a more holistic understanding of language in its social context. Hymes argued that to understand language fully, one must examine it within the cultural framework in which it operates. This approach recognizes that language is not merely a system of sounds and meanings but a social phenomenon that reflects and shapes cultural reality (Saville-Troike, 2003).The cornerstone of this theoretical framework is the SPEAKING model, an acronym that represents eight essential components of communicative events. This model provides a systematic method for analyzing speech situations and understanding the complex interplay between language and culture (Hymes, 1974).

### **3.1.1 SETTINGS AND SCENE (S)**

The first component, Setting and Scene, encompasses both the physical and psychological context of communication. Setting refers to the time and place of the speech act, while scene refers to the cultural definition of the occasion (Wardhaugh, 2006). In the context of Mr. Osaro Obaze's household, this component is crucial for understanding how different physical spaces within the compound and different times of day or occasions influence language use patterns among wives, children, and household members.

### **3.1.2 PARTICIPANTS (P)**

Participants include all individuals involved in the communicative event, both as speakers and hearers. This component examines not only who is speaking but also the social roles, relationships, and hierarchies that exist among participants (Duranti, 1997). In a polygynous household, the participant structure is complex, involving multiple wives, children of different ages, extended family members, and the household head, each occupying distinct social positions that influence their communicative behavior.

### **3.1.3 Ends (E)**

Ends refer to both the purposes, goals, and outcomes of communication. This component distinguishes between the intended purpose of the speaker and the actual outcome of the communicative act (Johnstone, 2008). In the harem context, understanding the various ends of communication—whether to maintain harmony, assert authority, negotiate resources, or express affection—is essential for comprehending the linguistic strategies employed.

### **3.1.4 A Sequences (A)**

Act sequences involve the actual form and content of what is said, including both the message form and message content. This component examines how ideas are organized and expressed linguistically (Schiffrin, 1994). In the study of Mr. Osaro Obaze's household, this involves analyzing the specific linguistic structures, discourse patterns, and conversational strategies used in different communicative contexts.

### **3.1.5 KE (K)**

Key refers to the tone, manner, or spirit in which a message is conveyed. It includes aspects such as serious versus playful, formal versus informal, or respectful versus mocking (Gumperz, 1982).

The key component is particularly significant in polygynous households where the same message might be conveyed with different keys depending on the relationship between participants and the social context.

### **3.1.6 Instrumentalities (I)**

Instrumentalities encompass the channels and forms of speech used in communication. This includes the choice of language or dialect, spoken versus written forms, and other channels of communication (Holmes, 2013). In multilingual contexts like Nigeria, where Mr. Osaro Obaze's household is situated, instrumentalities become particularly complex with multiple languages and varieties available for different communicative purposes.

### **3.1.7 Norms (N)**

Norms include both norms of interaction and norms of interpretation. These are the specific behaviors and properties attached to speaking and the common knowledge regarding how speech is interpreted within the community (Blommaert, 2005). In the harem context, these norms govern appropriate speech behavior for different members of the household and guide the interpretation of linguistic acts.

### **3.1.8 Genre (G)**

Genre refers to clearly demarcated types of utterances or speech events, such as prayers, lectures, conversations, or storytelling (Bauman, 1977). In the household setting, various genres emerge including disciplinary discourse, intimate conversation, formal greetings, and ceremonial speech, each with its own linguistic characteristics and social functions.

## **3.2 Application of the Theory**

The application of the Ethnography of Communication framework to the study of language use in Mr. Osaro Obaze's household provides a structured approach to understanding the complex analytical tool that enables the researcher to systematically examine how language functions

across different contexts within the household. In terms of Setting and Scene, the framework allows for an examination of how language use varies across different physical spaces within the compound—from private quarters to common areas, from the kitchen to the parlor—and how temporal factors such as meal times, evening gatherings, or special occasions influence linguistic behavior (Goffman, 1956). The scene component helps in understanding how cultural definitions of appropriate behavior in different contexts shape language choices. Regarding Ends, the framework facilitates examination of the various communicative goals present in the household, from maintaining family harmony and resolving conflicts to expressing love and affection, disciplining children, managing household resources, and preserving cultural traditions (Austin, 1962). The analysis can reveal how different linguistic strategies The Act Sequences component allows for detailed analysis of the actual linguistic forms used in the household, including code-switching patterns between languages, the use of proverbs and metaphors, turn-taking patterns in conversations, and the organization of narratives and explanations (Labov, 1972). This component is crucial for understanding the specific linguistic features that characterize communication in this context.

Key analysis reveals how the same message can be conveyed with different emotional and social tones depending on the relationship between speakers and the specific context of interaction (Bateson, 1972). This is particularly important in polygynous households where managing multiple relationships requires sophisticated linguistic sensitivity. The Instrumentalities component enables examination of language choice patterns, including when local languages versus English are used, when formal versus informal registers are employed, and how non-verbal communication supplements verbal interaction (Ferguson, 1959). In the multilingual Nigerian context, this component is essential for understanding the complex patterns of language use.

Norms analysis focuses on the implicit and explicit rules governing appropriate linguistic behavior within the household, including who can speak to whom, in what manner, and about what topics (Grice, 1975). These norms reflect broader cultural values while also being negotiated within the specific context of the household.

Finally, the Genre component allows for identification and analysis of the different types of speech events that regularly occur within the household, from daily greetings and meal conversations to conflict resolution sessions and storytelling events (Briggs, 1988). Each genre has its own linguistic characteristics and social functions within the household ecology.

### **3.3 Relevance/Justification of the Theory**

The Ethnography of Communication framework is particularly well-suited for this study of language use in Mr. Osaro Obaze's household for several compelling reasons. First, the framework's emphasis on context aligns perfectly with the need to understand how the unique social structure of a polygynous household shapes linguistic behavior (Hymes, 1972). Unlike approaches that focus solely on linguistic forms, the Ethnography of Communication recognizes that meaning emerges from the interaction between language and its social context. The holistic nature of the SPEAKING model makes it ideal for capturing the complexity of communication within a household that involves multiple generations, different educational backgrounds, various cultural affiliations, and complex power dynamics (Saville-Troike, 2003). Traditional linguistic analysis might focus on isolated features of language use, but this framework enables examination of how all aspects of the communicative situation work together to create meaning.

The framework's cultural sensitivity is particularly relevant given that polygynous households operate within specific cultural contexts that may differ significantly from monogamous family structures (Spradley, 1980). The Ethnography of Communication approach respects and seeks to understand these cultural differences rather than imposing external analytical frameworks that might miss important cultural nuances. Furthermore, the theory's focus on speech communities aligns with the conceptualization of the household as a distinct speech community with its own norms, practices, and linguistic characteristics (Labov, 1972). This perspective allows for examination of how the household develops its own communicative culture while also connecting to broader social and cultural patterns.

The practical applicability of the SPEAKING model provides a systematic methodology for data collection and analysis that ensures comprehensive coverage of the various factors that influence language use in this context (Schiffrin, 1994). This systematic approach enhances the reliability

and validity of the research findings while providing a clear framework for organizing and presenting results.

The framework's interdisciplinary nature, drawing from linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and communication studies, reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the research problem (Duranti, 1997). Understanding language use in polygynous households requires insights from multiple disciplines, and the *Ethnography of Communication* provides a theoretical bridge that connects these different perspectives.

Additionally, the theory's emphasis on participant perspectives aligns with the study's commitment to understanding language use from the viewpoints of household members themselves rather than imposing external interpretations (Geertz, 1973). This emic approach is essential for developing authentic insights into the lived experience of communication within the household.

The framework's ability to handle multilingual situations is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context where households typically navigate multiple languages and language varieties (Myers-Scotton, 1993). The *SPEAKING* model provides tools for analyzing how different languages are used for different purposes and in different contexts within the same household.

Finally, the *Ethnography of Communication*'s attention to power dynamics and social relationships makes it well-suited for examining how language both reflects and constructs the complex social hierarchies present in polygynous households (Fairclough, 1989). This aspect is crucial for understanding how language use both maintains and potentially challenges existing social arrangements within the household.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected from Mr. Osaro Ọbaze's harem, analyzes the linguistic features that emerged in different communicative situations, presents a detailed account of the background and family life of Mr. Osaro Ọbaze. It examines his early life, educational struggles, personal challenges, and how these experiences shaped his decisions later in life, particularly his choice of marriage and the establishment of his polygamous household and also discusses the findings in relation to existing sociolinguistic and pragmatic theories. The chapter begins with a brief history of Mr. Obaze, his wives, and children, after which the data is presented, analyzed, and interpreted.

#### 4.1 DATA PRESENTATION

Data was collected through participant observation, informal interviews, and audio recordings of conversations within the harem. The focus was on identifying recurring language use patterns in everyday interactions. The data revealed five dominant categories of language use in the harem

TYPES OF LANGUAGES	EXAMPLES IN EDO LANGUAGES AND NIGERIA PIDGIN	TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE	FUNCTIONS
1. <b>Competitive language</b>	ghẹ miamia wẹ mẹ ọ biẹ ọmọdiọ	1: “Do not forget, I am the one who gave our husband his first son.”	Asserting worth, rivalry, dominance
2. Abusive /Insulting language	Ọna ọ zẹ wẹ u ma biẹ ọmọkpia	That's why you couldn't give birth to a male child	Verbal aggression, humiliation

3. Secretive/Coded	Ebe nọ rhięrhien ọ gbe ẹwe	Wives may use proverbs or figurative speech to criticize or warn others without confronting them	Asserting worth, rivalry, dominance
4. Respectful Language:	Labo , Iyowa	Good morning, senior wife	Maintaining hierarchy, harmony
5. Instructional Language	Sa amẹ ye erhen ne erha wue nọ ya khue	Boil water so your father can bath	Assigning tasks, order
6. Affectionate language	Ọmwa ni ruẹ emwen ọghe, u ya mwẹn ghoghọ vbe ẹna	“My darling, you’ve really made me proud today.”	Bonding, closeness
7. Narrative/Storytelling	Eghe nẹ I na sẹ owa na, I ma kpolo sẹ ona	“When I first came here, I wasn't as fat as this	Teaching, entertaining
8. Advisory/Guidance	Ghe gbe ókhuò osa gha ruẹ	Don't worry the lord will do it	Mentorship, guidance
9. Defensive language	No blame me, na way tin she talk I dey answer(in Pidgin)	“Do not blame me, I was only repeating her words.”	Protecting reputation, avoiding blame
10. Negotiating language	U gha le evbare vbe owie, I	“if you cook this morning,	Conflict

	le vbe ota	I will cook in the evening "	avoidance, task sharing
11. Exclusionary language	U ma ghee e omwa dan no	Two wives switch into their native dialect in front of a third wife who doesn't understand it, deliberately leaving her out of the conversation (See her, a wicked person)	Creating in-groups, isolating rivals
12. Appealing / Pleading	Lahọ ya bọ mwe, I ma ren rue o gha mue rue orhu	"Please forgive me, I didn't know it will offend you	Seeking mercy, reconciliation
13. Strategic Silence	Hmmmm , oma	"Refusing to respond to an insult."	Showing resistance, preserving dignity
14. Flattering	U mose se avbe e ni kere	Your beauty still outshines the younger wives."	Winning favor, manipulation
15. Mocking language	Iku ne ugbe vbe enason owa ya na weghe	"Your dance yesterday nearly shook the compound walls	Humor or veiled insult
16. Proverbial /	Ikhiavbo e tan see e no	The okaro tree cannot be	Wisdom, indirect

Metaphorical	yaen	tall then it owner	advice
17. Prayerful / Religious	Osa gha rhie omokpia nuẹ	1.“God will give you your own son, do not worry.”	Comfort, moral support
18. Directive Response	U gha ye obọ kaen uwawa mwẹn u gha miẹ emwin ni khin	1.“If you touch my pot again, you will see my true color.”	Warning, dominance
19.Strategic Praise	For her mind,Na she loyal pass well(in Pidgin)	No one can match your loyalty in this house	Manipulation
20.Confessional language	U da rhie owa na, i ma ruẹ emwẹn wẹ	When you first came to the house I hated you so much	Repairing bonds, clearing conscience
21. Alliance-Building	We no go let her dey tell us way tin we go dey do for this house	1.Let us agree never to let her rule us with pride.”	Strengthening political ties
22. Maternal / Nurturing	U we emwi nọ bun vbe ẹde ne na ya hẹwẹ	1. “Come, my daughter, eat some food before you faint	Caregiving, showing seniority
23. Encouraging / Inspirational	Ziengbe omwinmwẹn ẹghẹ ruẹ gha sẹẹ	“Your day will come, just be patient.”	Motivation, hope

24. Suspicious / Questioning	U wa na guan kherekhere vbe ikian gberra?	Why are you always whispering when I pass?"	Doubt, seeking hidden truths
25. Instructional / Comparison	Lele ode ọghe rhunmwuda ọ ren emwi seẹ ima	"Follow her way, she is experienced.	Teaching through role models
26. Jealous	Ọ rhoo vbe ọ ma seẹ ima rhunmwuda ọ ka biẹ ọmokpia	"She thinks she is better than us just because she born him his first son."	Indirect rivalry
27. Humble / Submissive	I gha ziengbe rhunmwuda iren ọ re enowanren ima	1. "I accept whatever the chief decides." 2. "I will endure, for he is the head."	Indirect caution
28. Manipulation	Ọ kheke ne u hewe, I gha ruẹ emwi no kheke na ruẹ vbe owa	you deserve to rest, let me do the chores for today" (but later uses it to claim favor before the husband).	Gaining allies, strategy
29. Warning / Advisory	Loo ewaen rhunmwuda iten gbe mu ọ khe odaro vbe udemwe	1. "Be careful, pride goes before a fall." 2. "A sharp tongue cuts its owner first."	Indirect caution
30. Complaining	Vboze na na miẹ imẹ ọ vba le evbare	"Why must I always be the one to cook?"	Expressing dissatisfaction

31. Respectful Disagreement	I rẹn emwi ne u ta,sokpan i ma kue yọ	"I understand you, but I see things differently."	Avoiding open conflict
32. Indirect Compliment	Uwọmwẹn wẹ rhiẹnriẹn vbe ẹna ọ ma ye vbe ne u le vbe ederrio ne umwe na bun gbe wọ	1: "Your stew is much better today; at least it's not too salty like last time."	Half-praise, half-criticism
33. Regretful / Remorseful	No vex, I no mean to talk to you like that yesterday (in Pidgin)	1. "I should not have spoken harshly yesterday." 2. "Forgive me for raising my voice earlier."	Restoring peace
34. Playful / Childlike Language	U ma na fiẹn imiowo mẹ, I gha vbiẹ vbe na ọvbokhan	"If you don't share your meat with me, I'll cry like a baby."	Bonding, easing tension
35. Encouraging Solidarity	Akugbe ọ ẹtin	United we stand divided we fall	Unity, resistance
36. Confrontation	Do tae vbe odaro mwẹn	"Say it to my face if you are brave!"	Direct conflict
37. Boastful language	38. Ọ de ukpon mẹ node rhunmwuda mọ biẹ ọmokpia ne ọdion	1: "He bought me rapper yesterday, because I was the one who give birth to his first male child	Show off, Provokes envy

38. Collaborative / Supportive	Gha ziegie koko lẹ evbare ọdọ ima te rhe	“Let’s prepare the meal together before the chief returns.”	Encouraging, mentoring, sharing responsibility
39. Gossip / Informal Talk	I họn wẹ iyan gha gbinna vbe ẹghẹ aṣon	I heard they fought last night	Bonding, social control, rumor spreading
40. Mocking songs	Ihuan itan  Ihuan na ya giẹ ọmwa	Insulting song	Insult , mocking and laughing

## 4.2 DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the analysis of linguistic data collected from a harem setting using Dell Hymes’ (1974) SPEAKING model, which provides a framework for understanding the sociocultural and communicative components of speech events. The analysis focuses on how women (co-wives) in a polygynous household use language to express emotions, negotiate power, build alliances, and maintain social order. Each communicative act is interpreted in terms of its Setting and Scene (S), Participants (P), Ends (E), Act Sequence (A), Key (K), Instrumentalities (I), Norms (N), and Genre (G).

### 4.2.1 SETTING AND SCENE (S)

Setting refers to the time and place of the speech act, while scene refers to the cultural definition of the occasion. The speech events occur primarily within the harem a domestic space shared by multiple

wives of a single husband. Common physical settings include: the bedroom, the kitchen, the backyard and the seating room. Findings reveal that speech events occurred mainly in two physical settings the kitchen and the bedroom each associated with specific communicative purposes.

**The kitchen** .It serves as an informal interaction space where gossip, competition, and cooperation are common. Conversations here often revolves around other co-wives or the husband, expressing rivalry and alliance-building.

**The bedroom** . The bedroom on the other hand, is a private setting associated with intimate, persuasive, or manipulative speech. Wives uses affectionate or emotional talk to seek attention or favor from the husband.

The data shows that spatial setting strongly influences speech behaviour. Domestic spaces function as symbolic arenas of negotiation. The kitchen promotes solidarity and competition among co-wives, while the bedroom supports personal persuasion and emotional expression.

#### **4.2.2 PARTICIPANTS (P):**

Participants include all individuals involved in the communicative event, both as speakers and hearers.

The four categories of participants emerged: senior wife, junior wives, husband, and children.

- Senior wife (Iyowa): Uses directive and advisory language, reflecting authority.

- Junior wives: Often employ flattering, strategic, or submissive language to gain favor or avoid conflict.

-Husband: Serves as both an addressee and a topic of discussion, often referred to indirectly.

-Children: Act as secondary participants, silent observers, or message carriers.

The participant roles correspond directly with power hierarchies. Linguistic strategies such as flattery, respect, or coded references are determined by the participant's social position. This aligns with sociolinguistic theories of language and power, where communicative forms mirror hierarchical relationships.

#### **4.2.3 ENDS (E):**

Ends refer to both the purposes, goals, and outcomes of communication. This component distinguishes between the intended purpose of the speaker and the actual outcome of the communicative act. Each speech act has a goal or purpose, which reflects the interpersonal dynamics in the harem. Each speech act in the harem serves clear communicative goals, such as:

- Competitive language: Asserting superiority or dominance.
- Abusive/insulting language: Verbal attack or humiliation.
- Flattering/praise language: Gaining favor or manipulating emotions.
- Advisory/prayerful language: Offering comfort or guidance.
- Secretive/coded language: Concealing information or excluding outsiders.
- Mocking songs: Expressing rivalry or shaming indirectly.

Language in the harem is highly goal-oriented. Every utterance carries a social purpose whether to build alliances, manage conflict, or assert status. Communication is thus not random but strategically motivated, supporting the notion that language is a tool for social survival within constrained power systems.

#### **4.2.4 ACT SEQUENCE(A):**

Act sequences involve the actual form and content of what is said, including both the message form and message content. This component examines how ideas are organized and expressed linguistically. The structure of speech events follows culturally recognizable patterns:

- Instructional acts: directives followed by compliance (“Boil water so your father can bathe”).
- Mocking acts: insult followed by laughter or mimicry to reinforce group unity.
- Advisory acts: advice softened with a proverb or prayer (“Don’t worry, the Lord will do it”).
- Confessional acts: admission of wrongdoing followed by apology and reconciliation.

These recurrent sequences demonstrate the existence of interactional scripts in the harem. The use of proverbs and laughter functions as a face-saving mechanism, reducing social tension and maintaining group harmony.

#### **4.2.5 KEY (K):**

Key refers to the tone, manner, or spirit in which a message is conveyed. It includes aspects such as serious versus playful, formal versus informal, or respectful versus mocking

Different tones and manners of speaking were identified:

- Serious/Solemn: In prayerful or advisory talk.
- Playful/Teasing: In friendly or childlike joking.
- Aggressive/Harsh: In abusive or competitive speech.
- Emotional/Pleading: In apology or confession.
- Cautious/Indirect: In secretive or coded communication.

Tone is a deliberate communicative resource. Speakers modulate tone according to social context harshness expresses dominance, while softness invites empathy or forgiveness. The variation in tone reflects emotional intelligence and pragmatic competence among the wives.

#### **4.2.6 INSTRUMENTALITIES(I):**

Instrumentalities encompass the channels and forms of speech used in communication. This includes the choice of language or dialect, spoken versus written forms, and other channels of communication .

Language use in the harem involves both Edo , Nigerian Pidgin, and English often in a mixed or code-switched form.

Communication is primarily oral, though supported by songs, proverbs, metaphors, and tone of voice.

Proverbs such as "Ebe nọ rhięnrhięn ọ gbe ẹwe "(meaning "the leaf that is sweet kills the goat") conveyed indirect criticism through figurative speech.

Code-switching between Edo and Pidgin marks shifts in intimacy, secrecy, or formality. The use of proverbs and metaphors serves as a form of linguistic camouflage, allowing sensitive topics to be discussed indirectly. This demonstrates high levels of communicative competence among the women.

#### **4.2.7 NORMS (N):**

These are the specific behaviors and properties attached to speaking and the common knowledge regarding how speech is interpreted within the community. Norms include both norms of interaction and norms of interpretation. Interactional norms within the harem were deeply embedded in cultural expectations:

- Respect for senior wives and elders is mandatory.

- Open confrontation is discouraged; indirect speech is preferred.
- Proverbs and flattery are valued as signs of maturity and respect.
- Gossip and mockery are tolerated only within social limits.

Norms regulate acceptable speech behavior and maintain social balance. The wives strategically navigate these norms to avoid punishment or social isolation, revealing how linguistic norms enforce hierarchy and harmony simultaneously.

#### **4.2.8 GENRE (G):**

Genre refers to clearly demarcated types of utterances or speech events, such as prayers, lectures, conversations, or storytelling. Seven main speech genres are identified:

- Everyday conversation (competitive, advisory, instructional).
- Songs (mocking or praise).
- Proverbs and idioms (metaphorical speech).
- Prayers and blessings.
- Confession/Apologies.
- Narratives and storytelling.
- Coded/secret language.

Each genre serves a distinct social function — songs provide entertainment and indirect criticism, proverbs convey moral lessons, and coded speech protects secrecy. The diversity of genres underscores the creativity and adaptability of the women’s communicative practices.

#### **4.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings demonstrate that communication within the harem is not random but highly organized, strategic, and culturally regulated. Language serves as a powerful tool through which women negotiate identity, status, and emotional security in a competitive domestic environment. The study supports Dell Hymes’ (1974) assertion that understanding speech requires attention to both linguistic form and social function. Each element of the SPEAKING model reveals how meaning is constructed not only through words but through tone, setting, norms, and shared cultural knowledge. The dominance of indirect and coded language aligns with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, showing that speakers avoid direct confrontation to maintain “face” and social harmony. Proverbs and songs function as indirect acts of resistance, allowing women to express dissent within acceptable boundaries. Moreover, the coexistence of Edo and Nigerian Pidgin reflects a multilingual identity where language choice indexes solidarity, secrecy, or authority. This mirrors Gumperz’s (1982) view of code-switching as a contextualization cue that shapes interpretation. Ultimately, the harem’s linguistic system reflects broader African sociolinguistic patterns where language is both a cultural performance and a means of social control. The co-wives’ mastery of these communicative forms demonstrates not only linguistic creativity but also emotional intelligence and adaptive competence.

#### **4.4 FINDINGS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS**

1. Spatial influence: The kitchen and bedroom emerged as major linguistic arenas that shape tone, topic, and power expression.

2. Power dynamics: Speech patterns reflect household hierarchy — senior wives dominate through authority, juniors through flattery or coded speech.
3. Indirectness: Indirect communication, especially through proverbs and coded talk, helps manage rivalry without direct confrontation.
4. Multilingual strategies: The alternation between Edo and Pidgin serves pragmatic and emotional purposes — solidarity, secrecy, and respect.
5. Genre diversity: The range of speech genres (songs, prayers, stories) shows how women blend art, emotion, and strategy in communication.
6. Cultural norms: Speech behavior is governed by respect, restraint, and wisdom — core cultural values that preserve harmony despite rivalry.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.0 Introduction

this chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the research conducted on the language patterns and sociolinguistic dynamics observed in Mr. Osaro Obaze's harem. The chapter synthesizes the key findings from the data analysis, discusses their implications for understanding language use in polygamous household structures, and draws conclusions about the role of language in maintaining social hierarchies and relationships within this specific domestic context. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of how language functions as both a tool for communication and a marker of social positioning in complex family structures.

#### 5.1 Summary

This study investigated the language patterns, code-switching behaviors, and sociolinguistic dynamics within Mr. Osaro Obaze's polygamous household, employing ethnographic observation, interviews, and discourse analysis as primary methodological approaches. The research was guided by the theoretical frameworks of sociolinguistics, particularly focusing on language variation, power dynamics, and identity construction through linguistic choices.

The study examined several key aspects of language use within the household:

**Language Repertoire and Multilingualism:** The research revealed a complex multilingual environment where multiple languages coexist and serve different communicative functions. The household members demonstrated varying degrees of proficiency in local languages, pidgin English, and standard English, with each language variety serving specific social and contextual purposes.

**-Hierarchical Communication Patterns:** The investigation uncovered distinct patterns of language use that reflect and reinforce the existing social hierarchy within the household. Different linguistic strategies were employed when addressing the household head, senior wives, junior

wives, children, and domestic staff, indicating the role of language in maintaining social order and expressing respect or authority.

-Code-switching Phenomena: Extensive code-switching behavior was observed among household members, with switches occurring both within conversations (intra-sentential) and between conversational contexts (inter-sentential). These switches served various pragmatic functions including solidarity building, exclusion, emphasis, and accommodation to different interlocutors.

-Gender-specific Language Patterns: The study identified distinct gendered patterns in language use, with women in the household employing different linguistic strategies compared to male members. These patterns reflected broader societal gender roles while also revealing unique adaptations specific to the polygamous household context.

## **5.2 Findings**

The study revealed a clear hierarchy of language prestige within the household, with Nigeria pidgin occupying the highest position, followed by local indigenous languages [Benin], and finally a little English. However, the actual usage patterns showed that while Nigeria pidgin was accorded highest prestige, local languages dominated everyday informal interactions, suggesting a distinction between overt and covert prestige systems.

Mr. Osaro Obaze, as the household head, demonstrated the most extensive linguistic repertoire and served as a linguistic model for other family members. His code-switching patterns were notably strategic, using speaks benin for formal discussions and decision-making, pidgin or benin for intimate conversations with wives, and Pidgin English for interactions with his children and neighbors and certain casual contexts.

One of the most significant findings concerned the complex communication patterns among co-wives. The research identified three primary modes of inter-wife communication:

-Cooperative Communication: When working together on household tasks or discussing children's welfare, co-wives employed more inclusive linguistic strategies, often switching to shared languages and using collaborative discourse markers.

-Competitive Communication: In situations involving competition for resources or the husband's attention, more formal and sometimes exclusionary linguistic choices were observed, with speakers occasionally reverting to languages not shared by all co-wives.

-Solidarity Communication: Private conversations among co-wives often featured intimate code-switching patterns and the development of household-specific linguistic innovations, suggesting the formation of a unique speech community..

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study of language use in Mr. Osaro Obaze's harem has provided valuable insights into the complex sociolinguistic dynamics that characterize polygamous family structures in multilingual Nigerian contexts. The findings demonstrate that language serves multiple functions beyond basic communication, acting as a tool for identity construction, social positioning, relationship maintenance, and cultural preservation. The research confirms that polygamous households represent unique linguistic environments where traditional models of family language use require significant modification. The presence of multiple adult female figures, complex hierarchical relationships, and diverse linguistic backgrounds creates a linguistic ecology that is both more complex and more dynamic than typically found in nuclear family structures.

The study's findings have several important implications. First, they challenge simplistic notions of language shift and maintenance by showing how specific family structures can create conditions for the preservation of linguistic diversity. Second, they highlight the importance of examining language use within specific social contexts rather than making broad generalizations about language behavior. Third, they demonstrate the sophisticated linguistic competence required to navigate complex social environments. The research also reveals the adaptive capacity of language users in multilingual contexts. Household members demonstrated remarkable flexibility in their linguistic choices, developing context-sensitive strategies that allowed them to maintain relationships, express identity, and achieve communicative goals across a range of social situations.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to our understanding of how language functions in hierarchical social systems and provides evidence for the complex relationship

between language choice and social identity in multilingual contexts. The findings support theories that emphasize the dynamic and strategic nature of language use while also highlighting the importance of cultural and contextual factors in shaping linguistic behavior.

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