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## ORAL TRADITION IN LANGUAGE PRESERVATION AND REVITALIZATION: A STUDY OF INDIGENOUS NARRATIVES IN PLATEAU STATE

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### ABSTRACT

Oral tradition is a vital tool for language preservation and revitalization, especially among indigenous communities facing language endangerment. This study focuses on Plateau State, Nigeria, renowned for its linguistic diversity and threatened by globalizing influences, urbanization, and migration. Drawing on twenty indigenous proverbs from Pan and Anaguta, this paper explores how oral traditions sustain cultural identity and intergenerational transmission of endangered languages. Using ethnographic and qualitative methods, the study examines narratives from the Pan and Iguta-speaking communities to highlight their role in language retention. The theoretical framework is grounded in ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, and cultural transmission theory, emphasizing the interplay between language, culture, and identity. The findings reveal that oral traditions play a pivotal role in preserving linguistic heritage by embedding traditional knowledge in daily practices through proverbs and other means. However, challenges such as youth disinterest, lack of institutional support, and declining proficiency threaten their effectiveness. The study advocates for integrating oral traditions into education, community activities, and digital platforms to ensure sustainable language revitalization. Plateau State provides a model for leveraging oral traditions in preserving linguistic and cultural diversity, with lessons applicable to other linguistically endangered regions globally.

**Keywords:** Endangerment, language revitalization, linguistic heritage, oral tradition, proverbs

## INTRODUCTION

Language is not just a medium of communication but a vital repository of cultural knowledge, identity, and history. Across the globe, thousands of languages face extinction, with linguists estimating that nearly half of the world's languages could disappear by the end of the 21st century (Krauss, 1992). Nigeria, one of the most linguistically diverse countries, is home to over 500 languages. Among these, many are spoken in Plateau State, a region recognized for its extraordinary linguistic heterogeneity. However, the region's indigenous languages face significant threats due to urbanization, globalization, and the dominance of English and Hausa in formal and informal communication. Plateau State is home to several indigenous communities, including the Pan and Anaguta, whose languages are central to their identities. Oral traditions such as folktales, proverbs, songs, and myths have historically played a key role in preserving these languages and transmitting cultural values across generations. However, the survival of these oral traditions is increasingly under threat due to shifts in cultural practices, youth migration to urban centers, and the influence of digital technologies promoting dominant global languages. Despite the centrality of oral traditions in language preservation, they are often overlooked in formal revitalization strategies. Plateau State's indigenous communities face a dual challenge: the erosion of their linguistic heritage and the decline of traditional storytelling practices. Without intervention, many of these languages risk extinction, resulting in the loss of not only linguistic diversity but also the cultural knowledge embedded within these languages. The urgency of this study lies in addressing the gap between theoretical approaches to language preservation and the practical realities faced by indigenous communities. While policies and academic discourses often emphasize documentation and formal education, they rarely prioritize oral traditions as dynamic, living tools for language revitalization. This research is significant for several reasons. First, it highlights the critical role of oral traditions in preserving linguistic diversity in Plateau State. Second, it offers insights into how indigenous narratives can be leveraged to support language revitalization efforts. Finally, it contributes to the broader discourse on language preservation by emphasizing community-driven, culturally sensitive approaches. By focusing on Plateau State as a case study, this research not only documents the region's rich oral traditions but also provides a framework for integrating these traditions into broader revitalization strategies. The lessons learned from this study can inform similar efforts in other linguistically diverse regions facing language endangerment. The objectives of the study are to examine the current state

of indigenous oral traditions in Plateau State; analyze the role of oral traditions in preserving and revitalizing endangered languages; identify barriers to the effective use of oral traditions in language preservation, and; propose strategies for integrating oral traditions into contemporary language revitalization efforts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review examines existing scholarship on language endangerment, the role of oral traditions in language preservation, and the specific challenges faced by indigenous languages globally and in Plateau State, Nigeria.

### Language Endangerment and Revitalization

#### *Global Perspectives on Language Endangerment*

Language endangerment has emerged as a critical issue in linguistics, with scholars like Krauss (1992) and Crystal (2000) emphasizing the alarming rate at which languages are disappearing. Krauss estimated that 90% of the world's languages could become extinct or moribund within a century. Similarly, Crystal highlighted the cultural, intellectual, and ecological losses associated with language extinction, arguing that each endangered language is a repository of unique knowledge systems and worldviews. Revitalization efforts worldwide have included documentation projects, such as the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project, and community-driven initiatives like language nests and immersion programmes (Hinton, 2013). However, these approaches often focus on formal education and written documentation, neglecting the dynamic role of oral traditions in sustaining languages.

#### *Language Endangerment in Africa*

Africa, home to nearly 2,000 languages, is a linguistic hotspot with significant challenges. Scholars like Adebijia (2004) have documented the impact of colonialism, globalization, and urbanization on indigenous languages. In Nigeria, the dominance of English as the official language and Hausa as a lingua franca has marginalized minority languages, including those in Plateau State. Language shift is particularly pronounced among younger generations, who often adopt dominant languages for economic and social mobility. Efforts to counter this trend, such as the development of orthographies and the promotion of bilingual education, have had limited success due to inadequate funding, policy gaps, and community resistance.

## **Oral Traditions as a Tool for Language Preservation**

### ***The Role of Oral Traditions in Cultural Continuity***

Oral traditions, encompassing folktales, proverbs, songs, and oral poetry, are critical for transmitting cultural values and linguistic structures. Ong (1982) argued that oral cultures rely on narrative forms to encode and pass down knowledge, making oral traditions a dynamic and adaptable medium for cultural preservation. In linguistically diverse regions like Plateau State, oral traditions have historically functioned as living archives of language and culture. Proverbs, for example, condense complex ideas into memorable phrases, while songs serve as both entertainment and vehicles for language learning. Storytelling, often performed in communal settings, reinforces linguistic proficiency and cultural identity.

### **Case Studies on Oral Traditions and Language Preservation**

Studies from various contexts illustrate the effectiveness of oral traditions in language preservation. For example, Hinton (2013) documented the use of oral storytelling among Native American tribes to revive endangered languages. Similarly, Zemp (2006) highlighted how traditional songs in the Solomon Islands have preserved linguistic elements no longer used in daily speech. In Africa, scholars like Bamgbose (1991) have emphasized the importance of oral literature in sustaining indigenous languages. Bamgbose argued that oral traditions should be integrated into formal education to promote linguistic and cultural diversity.

### **Indigenous Narratives in Plateau State**

#### ***Overview of Indigenous Narratives***

Plateau State's linguistic diversity is mirrored in its rich oral traditions. Among the Pan-speaking people, storytelling is a communal activity that reinforces social values and linguistic skills. Narratives often feature themes of resilience, morality, and the human-nature relationship.

Similarly, the Anaguta people's songs and proverbs reflect their cosmology and social structures, embedding linguistic features unique to their dialects.

### **Challenges Facing Indigenous Narratives**

Despite their cultural significance, indigenous narratives in Plateau State face numerous challenges. The erosion of traditional storytelling practices is linked to several factors:

1. **Urbanization and Migration:** Younger generations migrate to urban centers, where dominant languages like Hausa and English replace indigenous tongues in daily interactions.

2. Digital Influence: Exposure to global media has shifted entertainment preferences, reducing interest in traditional storytelling.
3. Policy and Education: The exclusion of indigenous languages and oral traditions from formal education marginalizes their relevance.

## **Challenges of Language Preservation**

### ***Globalization and Modernization***

Globalization has introduced dominant global languages, particularly English, into previously isolated communities. As a result, indigenous languages are often perceived as less valuable or relevant in a globalized world. Modernization has also disrupted traditional practices, replacing communal storytelling with individual consumption of digital

### **Institutional Barriers**

The lack of institutional support for indigenous languages exacerbates their endangerment. Policies often prioritize national or colonial languages over minority languages, sidelining oral traditions as informal and non-essential.

### **Community-Level Challenges**

At the community level, declining interest among younger generations poses a significant threat. Parents increasingly prioritize dominant languages for their children's education and career prospects, reducing opportunities for the transmission of oral traditions. The literature highlights the critical role of oral traditions in language preservation but also underscores the challenges posed by globalization, modernization, and institutional neglect. While global examples demonstrate the potential of oral traditions in revitalization efforts, the specific context of Plateau State requires tailored strategies that address local dynamics and challenges.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This section outlines the theoretical perspectives guiding the study, focusing on the interplay between language, culture, and oral tradition in the context of preservation and revitalization. The frameworks employed include Ethnolinguistics, Sociolinguistic Theory, and Cultural Transmission Theory.

### **Ethnolinguistics**

Ethnolinguistics examines the relationship between language and culture, emphasizing how linguistic practices reflect and shape cultural identities. Gumperz (1982) highlighted the inseparability of language and culture,

arguing that linguistic forms carry embedded cultural meanings that sustain group identity. For indigenous communities, oral traditions such as storytelling, proverbs, and songs serve as linguistic repositories of cultural knowledge. In Plateau State, ethnolinguistics provides a lens to understand how indigenous narratives encode social values, histories, and ecological knowledge. For example, the Pan people's oral tales often reflect their interactions with the environment, while the Anaguta use proverbs to encapsulate social norms. Through this framework, the study investigates how these traditions function as cultural archives, preserving linguistic diversity even in the absence of written documentation.

### **Sociolinguistic Theory**

#### ***Language Shift and Maintenance***

Joshua Fishman's (1991) work on reversing language shift (RLS) provides a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of language endangerment and revitalization. Fishman identified intergenerational transmission as the key to sustaining endangered languages, emphasizing the importance of family and community domains in fostering linguistic continuity. In Plateau State, sociolinguistic theory highlights the challenges of maintaining endangered languages in the face of urbanization, migration, and education systems dominated by English and Hausa. Oral traditions, particularly storytelling and songs, play a critical role in resisting language shift by embedding indigenous languages in communal practices. This study employs Fishman's framework to analyze how Plateau communities can leverage oral traditions for language maintenance.

#### ***Language and Identity***

Sociolinguistics also explores the role of language in constructing and negotiating identity. Scholars like Bucholtz and Hall (2005) have argued that linguistic practices are central to expressing group identity, particularly in multicultural and multilingual contexts. For Plateau State's indigenous communities, oral traditions are not only linguistic tools but also expressions of cultural pride and resistance to assimilation.

### **Cultural Transmission Theory**

Cultural transmission theory focuses on how cultural knowledge and practices are passed down across generations. Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981) identified three modes of transmission:

Vertical Transmission: From parents to children.

Horizontal Transmission: Among peers.

Oblique Transmission: From one generation to unrelated younger individuals.

In the context of Plateau State, oral traditions represent a blend of vertical and oblique transmission. Parents and elders serve as primary custodians of indigenous narratives, while communal storytelling events enable broader intergenerational exchange. This study employs cultural transmission theory to explore how these practices sustain linguistic and cultural continuity. These three frameworks converge to provide a comprehensive understanding of how oral traditions function in language preservation and revitalization. Ethnolinguistics situates the study within the cultural context of Plateau State, while sociolinguistic theory addresses the broader dynamics of language shift and identity. Cultural transmission theory complements these perspectives by focusing on the mechanisms through which oral traditions are passed down. By integrating these frameworks, this study examines the following key questions:

How do oral traditions encode cultural and linguistic knowledge in Plateau State?

What sociolinguistic factors influence the effectiveness of oral traditions in resisting language shift?

What transmission modes are most effective in sustaining oral traditions across generations?

## **Method**

This section describes the research design, sampling strategies, data collection methods, and analytical approaches used to investigate the role of oral traditions in preserving and revitalizing indigenous languages in Plateau State.

### ***Research Design***

This study adopts a qualitative approach rooted in ethnographic methods. A qualitative design is appropriate for exploring the nuanced ways in which oral traditions contribute to language preservation, allowing for an in-depth understanding of cultural and linguistic practices. The study combines fieldwork with participatory research to engage directly with the communities under study. The research employs a case study approach, focusing on Plateau State as a microcosm of linguistic diversity in Nigeria. The case study method facilitates a detailed examination of indigenous narratives and their role in resisting language endangerment.



### ***Sampling***

#### **Study Area**

The study focuses on three linguistically rich communities in Plateau State:

1. Pan-speaking people: Known for their folktales and communal storytelling practices.
2. Anaguta-speaking people: Prominent for their proverbs and traditional songs.

#### **Participants**

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of diverse age groups, genders, and roles within the community. Key participant categories include:

Elders and custodians of oral traditions.

Local storytellers, poets, and musicians.

Youths and children who engage with oral traditions. A total of 40 participants (20 from each community) were engaged in the study, with efforts made to balance gender representation.

#### **Data Collection**

##### ***Primary Data***

##### **1. Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with elders, storytellers, and community leaders to gather insights into the historical and cultural significance of oral traditions. Interviews also explored participants' perceptions of language endangerment and revitalization.

##### **2. Storytelling and Narrative Sessions**

Storytelling sessions were organized in each community to observe oral traditions in their natural setting. Participants shared folktales, songs, and proverbs in their native languages, providing a firsthand understanding of the linguistic features and cultural themes embedded in these narratives.

##### **3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

FGDs were conducted with youths to explore their engagement with oral traditions and the challenges they face in maintaining linguistic practices. These discussions provided insights into generational differences in language use and attitudes toward oral traditions.

##### ***Secondary Data***

Archival research was conducted to review existing documentation of Plateau State's oral traditions. Sources included:

Published collections of folktales and proverbs.



Ethnographic studies on Plateau communities.  
Government and NGO reports on language preservation initiatives.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The method adopted for analysis in this study is content/thematic analysis. Proverbs encapsulate the lived experiences and collective wisdom of communities. They function as educational tools, offering guidance on acceptable behaviour and social expectations. The thematic elements within proverbs provide a window into the cultural and moral fabric of societies, revealing what is esteemed, admonished, or considered taboo. Analyzing the themes present in proverbs illuminates universal human concerns as well as unique societal values. These concise expressions continue to be relevant, offering timeless insights and guidance rooted in collective experience.

### **DISCUSSION**

Proverbs are concise, memorable expressions of popular wisdom, often deriving from cultural contexts and experiences. Here, we analyze each of the selected proverbs from the Pan and Anaguta cultures, exploring their meanings, implications, and the lessons they convey.

#### **Kwaan (Proverbs)**

Proverbs are an essential part of cultural wisdom and reflect societal values, norms, and beliefs. The Pan proverbs listed encompass a range of themes related to human relationships, moral conduct, the nature of challenges, and the consequences of actions. Below is a comprehensive discussion and analysis of each proverb:

1. Wu ǵətəŋ lai lə ǵə wu nkong  
Translation: A situation that worsens an existing one (adding salt to injury).  
Analysis: This proverb highlights the idea of compounding problems rather than alleviating them. It implies that certain actions or decisions can aggravate an already difficult situation. This serves as a caution against unconsidered responses to challenges, urging individuals to be mindful not to exacerbate their problems through poor choices.
2. Təm wal lə kə ək  
Translation: Requesting help where such help is equally needed.  
Analysis: This proverb addresses the notion of mutual assistance and shared burden. It suggests that seeking help from others when both parties

are in similar predicaments is unwise; instead, it encourages individuals to find solutions independently before seeking external support. It emphasizes empathy and the importance of considering the context before making requests.

3. Laa wu 6eslep gə kən es lə nkongwan mou  
Translation: Obedience is always rewarded,  
Analysis: Obedience here reflects adherence to societal rules or authority figures. This proverb promotes a value system where following guidance, respecting traditions, or complying with rules brings about positive outcomes. It underscores the belief in order and reward structures within communities, where obedience is seen as a pathway to success or favour.
4. Zeel wufuo gə lapshak gə zeel wusəgər mou  
Translation: However little food is eaten is better than being on an empty stomach.  
Analysis: This proverb advocates for moderation and gratitude, emphasizing the importance of appreciating what one has, no matter how little. The broader implication is about survival and the intrinsic value of sustenance, promoting resilience in the face of scarcity. It encourages a mindset of sufficiency over the pursuit of abundance.
5. Komtəng kwapshak  
Translation: Parties with mutual interests separated by necessity.  
Analysis: This proverb reflects the complexities of human relationships, particularly in the context of shared interests that may not align perfectly over time. It serves as a reminder that circumstances can change, leading to necessary separations, despite previous collaborations or alliances. This insight underscores the inevitability of change and the need for adaptability.
6. War glong gə tə dagagap mou  
Translation: A longer but safer road is better than a shorter but riskier one.  
Analysis: This proverb highlights the value of safety and caution in decision-making. It asserts that taking more time to achieve a goal is sometimes preferable to taking unnecessary risks. This can be interpreted as advocating for strategic thinking and risk assessment in one's endeavors, ultimately promoting thorough planning over impulsive actions.

7. Cuk pəttaa kə shii matdēm  
Translation: An evil act that boomerangs on the planner.  
Analysis: This proverb speaks to the concept of karma or the repercussions of one's actions. It indicates that plotting harm or wrongdoing will likely backfire, which serves as a moral warning against malicious intentions. This fosters a culture of integrity and encourages individuals to consider the long-term consequences of their actions.
8. Pang d̄yilangshak  
Translation: The strong/mighty manipulating the weak because of self-interest.  
Analysis: This proverb critiques power dynamics and exploitation. It points to the tendency of those in positions of power to take advantage of the vulnerable. This serves as a reminder of the ethical responsibility of the powerful to act justly and fairly while also highlighting the importance of solidarity among the weaker members of society.
9. Pang lang gədər nэгән бəl  
Translation: A situation where ill-luck or unpleasant occurrence befalls one despite one's efforts to avoid it.  
Analysis: This proverb addresses the unpredictable nature of life, including the concept of fate and misfortune. It reflects the idea that despite due diligence and careful planning, negative outcomes can still occur. This acceptance can foster resilience and encourage individuals to adapt and persevere in the face of adversity.
10. Sar as won dər nagat  
Translation: Good intention not implemented because of natural inability.  
Analysis: This proverb conveys the notion that good intentions alone are insufficient if not accompanied by the ability to execute them. It highlights the importance of capability as a complement to intent, emphasizing that one's efforts can be hampered by circumstances beyond their control. This serves as an important reminder of humility and the need for realistic assessments of one's capabilities.

### **Ushizhih-Iguta (Proverbs)**

1. "Ujih rang zhingizah dih wah ah riyah tuhpohpoh."

Translation: If you do not know how to sieve well, you will eat chaff.

Analysis: This proverb emphasizes the importance of skill and knowledge in achieving desired outcomes. It conveys that lack of expertise can lead to poor results, symbolized by the undesirable consumption of chaff instead of grain. It stresses the necessity of proper training and education, highlighting that diligence and understanding in one's tasks are crucial for success.

2. "Ah huh lahlah tuhnyuh-nyuh nuh kpih gungahnah ah kundah kpaih nuh uweng."

Translation: When you dry locust beans cake on a winnow in the sun, both the locust bean cake and the winnow will suffer the heat. The result of a decision affects all/anybody.

Analysis: This proverb speaks to the interconnectedness of decisions and their ramifications. It highlights that individual actions have broader consequences that can affect others, illustrating the principle of collective responsibility. The imagery of both the locust bean cake and the winnow suffering emphasizes the idea that sometimes unintended consequences arise from one's choices.

3. "Muh-kpang bah mah kpoh-zoh nah bigihzih muh kuh ton-non lah-zah ih shing-shi wuh."

Translation: Gum does not fall on the ground without picking sand. Every action/decision taken has a resultant effect.

Analysis: This proverb draws attention to the inherent consequences that accompany any action. It conveys that there are always side effects or repercussions to consider. It encourages mindfulness of one's actions and decisions, reflecting a broader truth that every choice leads to specific outcomes, some of which might be unfavorable.

4. "Uh huh rau nah mah nah ruh-ruh, mah chechi'u nuh weng."

Translation: If you bring him/her to the shade, he/she will push you to the sun.

Analysis: This proverb illustrates the theme of ingratitude and betrayal. It conveys that helping another does not guarantee appreciation; instead, there's a risk of being repaid with hostility or disregard. This serves as a cautionary tale about the dynamics of relationships, highlighting the importance of discernment in choosing whom to help and suggesting the potential for adverse reactions even from those one assists.

5. Uzohmoh wuzah mahnang kinih undoh kah mah bukkuh-mak bah undoh kah-mah falyi mah wuh

Translation: The hare does not get angry with the person that shot it, but with the person that discovers its hole.

Analysis: This proverb underscores the importance of vulnerability and awareness of one's surroundings. The hare's reaction reveals that the root of its danger lies not in the immediate act of being shot, but rather in being exposed and having its safe haven discovered. It reflects how individuals may often find solace in blaming external circumstances (the hunter) while neglecting the more significant issues (the hole). The practical lesson here emphasizes the need for self-awareness and the importance of protecting personal vulnerabilities.

6. Bah kah uh-huh gurah uhtsom kih-nih uh wuh zah tuhuh tuh dah-huh ah moh kuh

Translation: If you combine running with scratching your buttock, you will be in danger.

Analysis: This proverb speaks to the pitfalls of distraction and inefficiency. The imagery of someone trying to run while engaging in a seemingly trivial act highlights how divided attention can lead to dire consequences. The message stresses the significance of focus in one's actions and decisions—attempting to multitask poorly can lead to failure or danger. In a broader sense, it reflects on the nature of human endeavors, especially those requiring concentration.

7. Vanah naganah kamah huh ambamal mawal mormok wuh amah mah bah mah wah mormoh wuh

Translation: A child that says his/her mother will not sleep, he/she will not sleep too.

Analysis: This proverb illustrates the interconnectedness of familial bonds and the shared consequences of one's actions within a family unit. It denotes that children often mimic or are affected by their parent's state—if a child causes their mother distress, that distress reciprocally affects the child. This saying emphasizes empathy and responsibility within family relationships, stressing that actions and feelings are not isolated but rather influence one another.

8. Bakah Unh guh mokoh buginih, mokoh bang ship nah ruh kpah buh ganah mangalah

Translation: If you want to catch a fish, catch it well on the head so that it will not slip off.

Analysis: This proverb is rich with metaphor about the necessity of effective action and thoroughness in efforts. Here, "catching a fish well on the head" suggests the importance of strategy—approaching tasks head-on with the right technique to achieve success without failure or loss. It can also reflect the idea of taking decisive and responsible actions, and the consequences of doing something halfway or with negligence, which could lead to losing opportunities.

9. Uh langah bah mah mokah uh langah wuh

Translation: The blind cannot hold/lead the blind.

Analysis: This proverb speaks to the concepts of guidance and the need for competence in leadership. The phrase suggests that one who lacks knowledge or insight cannot effectively lead others who are similarly uninformed. It is a critique of ineffective leadership and serves as a reminder of the importance of wisdom and experience in guiding others. This saying could apply to many contexts, from personal relationships to broader societal structures.

10. Uh kuhzuh ahruh au bakah ihzuh

Translation: Wash your calabash because of tomorrow.

Analysis: This proverb emphasizes the importance of preparation and foresight. By advising one to "wash your calabash," it symbolically suggests that one should take care of present responsibilities in anticipation of future needs. The calabash is often used for storage, and its cleanliness is a metaphor for readiness. This saying carries a strong message about the necessity of planning and taking proactive steps in life, reinforcing the principles of diligence and responsibility. These Pan and Anaguta proverbs encapsulate valuable lessons about human interactions, personal responsibility, and the unpredictable nature of life. They serve as guidance for making moral choices, navigating relationships, and cultivating resilience in facing life's challenges. The wisdom contained in these proverbs reflects deep cultural insights and continues to hold relevance in contemporary societal contexts. Aaron (2023) avers that proverbs are very important and valuable in revealing not just cultural beliefs, values and norms of the people but also give insight into the biocultural traditional knowledge of the Anaguta people and that proverbs serve as a powerful instrument for the transmission of indigenous knowledge and traditions. They are also an essential constituent of the Anaguta literature. The

proverbs analyzed reveal a rich tapestry of cultural wisdom and ethical considerations inherent to the community's worldview. These proverbs serve not just as sayings but as guidance for personal conduct, social relationships, and community interactions. Through metaphor, they encapsulate values such as awareness, responsibility, empathy, strategy, competence in leadership, and the importance of preparation for the future. Their continued relevance speaks to universal truths that resonate across various cultures and societies. These proverbs collectively reflect deep cultural wisdom regarding personal responsibility, the complexity of human relationships, and the consequences of one's actions. They provide valuable insights that encourage individuals to act thoughtfully, recognize their limitations, and understand the broader implications of their choices while navigating the interplay of patience, ingratitude, and the need for adaptability in various life circumstances.

Proverbs are not just linguistic expressions; they are a vital tool for educating and advising young people in African cultures. They encapsulate wisdom, nurture cultural identity, promote ethical behavior, and encourage young individuals to navigate their lives thoughtfully and responsibly. Through this tradition, communities ensure that their values and knowledge endure through time. The diversity of opinions and the complexity of life constitute the variety of functions proverbs perform in any given human society. In other words, proverbs are poly thematic and they are also poly functional. That means, depending on the circumstance, one proverb can perform different functions like cautioning, admonishing, rebuking and consoling. Arvo Kirkmann observes that proverbs "serve to confirm opinions, make prognoses, express doubts, reproaches, accusations, justification, excuses, consolations, derision or malicious joy, regrets, warning, recommendations e.t.c (107). Mieder (n.d) on his on part notes that "Proverbs may also function as warning, persuasion, admonition, reprimand, statement, characterization, explanation, description, justification, summarization e.t.c, and it is well possible that one and the same proverb takes completely different contexts of usage" (38-39). Generally, Kwaan and Ushizih-Iguta are used to offer advice. The significance of advice is illustrated with the following data from Pan and Iguta presented above. The Kwaan and Ushizih-Iguta presented are mostly spoken when advice on diligence is given especially to the youth. The proverbs underscore the need for people to carry out their duties and responsibilities with the highest sense of duty. When people are diligent in



carrying out their responsibilities, they deliver the best in the situation they find themselves.

### **Proverbs as Bearers of Philosophical Insight**

Proverbs as constituents of oral traditional materials serve as bearers of philosophical insight of the society they evolve from. Na'Allah & Ogunjimi (2005) comment on this trait of the proverb in the following words "proverbs embrace the philosophical and socio- cultural value systems of the people. They point to the individual, domestic and collective life patterns of the society from which they are derived" (65). Agbaje (2005) also demonstrates the philosophical nature of Yoruba proverbs emphasizing that philosophical insights are ingrained in Yoruba proverbs. Agbaje validates the view that: abstract issues are expressed ... proverbs based on the familiar ideas taken from their immediate environment. Also, skills at coining philosophical and poetic proverbs around such things as hills, rivers, birds, animals and domestic tools. This invariably makes proverbs represent the essence of the people's view... Without any doubt we know that proverbs fulfill philosophical and educational functions in the society (53). Agbaje's view on the philosophical nature of proverbs is very relevant to the proverbs of several nations. Kwaan and Ushizhih-Iguta also exhibit the philosophical trait embedded in the nature of proverbs globally.

### **Contributions of Oral Traditions to Language Preservation and Revitalization in Plateau State**

This section analyzes the findings of the study, focusing on the contributions of oral traditions to language preservation and revitalization in Plateau State. It addresses key themes, including the linguistic and cultural functions of oral traditions, the barriers to their sustainability, and potential strategies for integrating them into contemporary revitalization efforts.

#### **1. The Role of Oral Traditions in Language Preservation**

##### ***Linguistic Functions***

Oral traditions in Plateau State serve as reservoirs of linguistic diversity. Storytelling sessions revealed unique linguistic features such as idiomatic expressions, archaic vocabulary, and tonal nuances that are rarely used in daily speech. For example, Pan storytellers utilized metaphorical language to convey moral lessons, while Anaguta proverbs encoded complex social norms in concise phrases. These practices not only preserve endangered lexical and grammatical features but also facilitate language acquisition.

Children exposed to oral traditions often develop a deeper understanding of their native languages, as storytelling provides a natural and engaging context for learning. This aligns with Ong's (1982) argument that oral cultures use narrative forms to sustain linguistic complexity.

### ***Cultural Functions***

Beyond their linguistic value, oral traditions play a critical role in maintaining cultural identity. Narratives such as folktales and epic poetry serve as cultural archives, preserving historical events, genealogies, and ecological knowledge. For instance, Pan and Anaguta proverbs recount situations fostering a sense of communal pride and continuity. Proverbs act as moral guides, encapsulating cultural wisdom in memorable phrases. As one elder remarked, "A proverb is the shorthand of our ancestors' wisdom." This dual role of oral traditions—preserving language and culture—underscores their importance in resisting the homogenizing effects of globalization.

## **2. Challenges to Sustaining Oral Traditions**

### ***Urbanization and Migration***

The study revealed that urbanization and migration are among the most significant threats to oral traditions. Younger generations moving to cities often adopt dominant languages like Hausa and English, reducing their exposure to indigenous narratives. This language shift is exacerbated by the perception that native languages have limited economic utility.

### ***Digital Influence***

The influence of digital media has also altered entertainment preferences. Youths interviewed during focus group discussions expressed a greater interest in television, social media, and online content than in traditional storytelling. As one participant noted, "Why should I listen to a story when I can watch movies on my phone?"

### ***Decline in Intergenerational Transmission***

Another critical challenge is the weakening of intergenerational transmission. Elders who traditionally served as custodians of oral traditions reported that younger family members rarely participate in storytelling sessions. This shift reflects broader changes in family structures and social practices, where communal activities are being replaced by individual pursuits.

### ***Policy Gaps and Institutional Neglect***

The exclusion of indigenous languages and oral traditions from formal education systems further marginalizes these practices. Despite Nigeria's National Policy on Education advocating for mother-tongue instruction at the primary level, implementation remains inconsistent. In Plateau State, limited resources and teacher training hinder the integration of indigenous narratives into curricula.

### **3. Strategies for Revitalization**

#### ***Community-Driven Initiatives***

Participants emphasized the need for community-driven efforts to revitalize oral traditions. Recommendations included organizing storytelling festivals, establishing community centers for cultural activities, and encouraging elders to mentor youths in traditional practices.

#### ***Integration into Education***

Integrating oral traditions into formal education emerged as a key strategy. Teachers could use folktales, songs, and proverbs as teaching aids to enhance language learning and cultural awareness. For example, an Anaguta or Pan folktale about the origin of their clan could serve as both a history lesson and a language exercise.

#### ***Leveraging Digital Platforms***

Contrary to the perception of digital media as a threat, participants suggested that technology could be repurposed for revitalization. Recording and sharing indigenous narratives on platforms like YouTube or creating mobile apps featuring local proverbs could make oral traditions accessible to a wider audience.

#### ***Broader Implications***

Globally, the study underscores the importance of integrating oral traditions into language revitalization efforts. By demonstrating the effectiveness of storytelling, proverbs, and songs in sustaining linguistic and cultural diversity, the findings contribute to the broader discourse on endangered languages.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study set out to explore the role of oral traditions in the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages, with a focus on narratives from Plateau State, Nigeria. By examining the linguistic and cultural significance

of storytelling, proverbs, and songs, the research underscores the critical importance of oral traditions in resisting language endangerment. Language is more than a tool for communication; it is a vessel of culture, identity, and history. As Plateau State's indigenous communities confront the challenges of modernity, their oral traditions remain a beacon of resilience and adaptability. By revitalizing these narratives, we not only preserve endangered languages but also ensure the survival of the cultural heritage they embody. This study serves as a call to action for communities, educators, policymakers, and researchers to recognize and harness the transformative power of oral traditions in sustaining linguistic and cultural diversity.

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