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AKERE	Social motivation for ongoing sound change in Yoruba
MADUGU	The <i>na...na</i> construction in Nupe
NWACHUKWU	NP sentential complements in Igbo
UWALAKA	Igbo 'consecutivization' revisited
AWOYALE	Yoruba proper names: semantactic considerations
STIGLER	Some Nigerian language types
OYELARAN	Was Yoruba a creole?
WILLIAMSON	The classification of East Niger Congo
ELUGBE	The vowels of Proto-Ēdoid
ESSIEN	Languages of the Cross River State
CAPO	The codification of Nigerian languages
NDUKWE	Standardizing Nigerian languages
EMENANJO	Towards Neo-Central Igbo
MANFREDI	Centre and periphery in Ika literacy
OLAGOKE	Choosing a national language for Nigeria
AMAYO	The classification of Nigerian spoken English
MARCHESE & SCHNUKAL	Nigerian Pidgin English of Warri

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CENTRE AND PERIPHERY IN IKA LITERACY¹

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1. *Introduction: Once again, "Language vs. dialect"?* The following discussion explores the status of the Ika speech community, comprising the western end of the (1918) Asabà administrative division plus some adjacent towns of the Benin division, in a program of literacy and language education. Unlike many approaches in 'applied linguistics', this one will attempt to take seriously the political basis of the notion 'linguistic group' as it has developed in the practice of standardization and the ideology of ethnicity (see Nnñli 1980); and, by way of a 'return to the concrete', will motivate a critical perspective on problems faced in my fieldwork and in any publishing in Ika. The first step is to review the contradictory impasse faced by linguistic theory in describing social variation from an asocial point of view (this section); then to assess the damage done by static linguistics to the historical relationships defining Ika, through two generations of 'vernacular' preaching and teaching; and finally to suggest on the basis of the foregoing critique a more plausible alternative mode of capturing the non-linear, dialectical relationships which define the Ika situation as I have experienced it since 1976: the concept of a *centre-periphery* opposition is proposed as a new theoretical basis for both historical linguistic and literacy work in the area, of potentially greater fruitfulness than the mainly unconscious and one-way (top-down) models employed in both classification and standardization customarily. Before an excursion in Friere's much discussed but little used theory of education and imperialism (section 4), I suggest some of the texts which have played an important part in the 'critical consciousness' of the pre-literate era. In section 5 I confront the most open question of all: the future relevance of literacy to the oral culture itself; here we cannot fail to be inspired by Abimbólá's strategy of interrogating Odù 'Fá (the poetry of clairvoyance) for guidance in accommodating literacy to that symbolic system's own capacity for self-perpetuation and change. Although Ika is a 'little tradition' by comparison with Yorùbá, an important point of my survey is to show the links which unite the two in networks of political culture and therefore link their fate at the hands of states and churches. It is thus with a broader historical perspective on the politics of literacy and marginalization of the peasantry (section 6) that I conclude: the connection of standardization with separatism and of autonomy with development. *Ọhùhù kẹ mũ, ya kẹ wẹ kẹrin ẹ eku*

'The fowl excels in producing offspring, and they in turn surpass her in clucking' - i.e. the chickens you hatch will one day come home to roost.

As a beginning, let us examine the standard position that there is no theoretical or 'purely linguistic' distinction between language and dialect, which are thus reduced to apologetically 'pragmatic' terms as in this well-regarded handbook:

When operating with idealized uniformity linguists are using a working hypothesis only. In the same fashion a dialect is an entity based on a particular social selection of features. There is nothing peculiar in the notion of dialect being a "clear" concept of "folk science" rather than of strict linguistics. A social definition is of course also scientific... (Anttila 1972: 289).

By this defensive attitude, any threatened subsumption of linguistics by a unified social science is held off by appeals to value-freedom, and diverted into a safely hybridized separate discipline such as sociolinguistics.² But the attempt to shorn the term dialect of the contemptuous overtones it acquired through a century of official support for the unilectal concept of *la langue*, fails of its very earnestness. What does linguistics offer in place of the popular usage, by way of a definition of dialect? We find the most consistent effort undertaken in historical linguistics, which (like most self-consciously 'rigorous' sciences) has sought the solution to a qualitative impasse in quantification.

Lexicostatistics, the poor relation of the 1950's optimistic glottochronology, developed as complement to the comparative method: one measures the *differences* between languages caused by loss of cognation, while the other begins by establishing *similarities* grounded in the regularity of correspondences. For the comparatist, etymologies do not go away as much as they are simply obscured by new layers of innovation; two languages never become less related, except by implication relative to a third language which shares in the innovations of one more than of another. But the assumption of innovations occurring *between* languages rather than, often, *through* or *within* them is invalid whenever some degree of mutual intelligibility exists between the two speechforms. At that point, the family-tree model of inheritance gives way to the wave model of contact. The concept of dialecthood, of a *differentiated continuum* of similarity, finds its expression in the non-seriation of isoglosses, i.e. the non-convertability of a wave structure into any single subgrouping. The specific tension in this problem, however, is too much for our theoretical fabric, once again:

Both [stem and wave] diagrams are visual aids which show, in a single picture, interrelationships within the whole family or its subgroups. Models are, of course, icons of these relations, but since models represent certain hypotheses, they are icons of hypotheses. Overliteral interpretation is the greatest danger, since a picture (diagram) of a hypothesis cannot be more accurate than the hypothesis itself (Anttila 1972:307).

The purpose of theory being, after all, to construct diagrams and not to interpret them.

We have begun by criticizing the wave model's assumption of dialecthood, i.e. of mutual intelligibility, in order to demonstrate the complementarity and interdependence of the concepts of intelligibility and subgrouping. Lexicostatistics, then, is a theory of neither: it lacks a criterion of innovation for subgrouping, preferring to talk of gradual loss of relationship; and it draws no line between mutually intelligible and distantly related speechforms, offering only a continuum of percentage common lexica retained in a *recognizably similar shape*. It is from these percentages that the lexicostatistician constructs a theory of dialecthood, and the theory which results is not surprisingly a numerical average or midpoint between figure ranges of indisputably separate languages and of maximally close dialect samples. Williamson, the pupil of Dyen and (along with Swadesh's student Armstrong) the most consistent practitioner of lexicostatistics in Nigeria, offers just such averages in her work on the relationships among the 'wide Ìgbò' speechforms of which Ìka is one. She seeks to identify statistical correlates of the traditional terms of dialect cluster, language cluster and language group without measuring intelligibility, i.e. 'objectively'. This led in 1973 to the theoretical birth of the 'Lower Niger language group', reviving an old term for the collection of 'tribes of the Àsabà hinterland'; although in the aftermath of a civil war fought by systematic fissioning of 'ethnic minorities' from the secessionist core, it was perceived as a burial of the Ìgbò name. Let us not prejudge the method's motives, but examine its effect.

A difference of roughly 10% cognation in the Swadesh 200-word list (adapted to West Africa by Ibadan researchers) is taken to be the statistically significant index of differing degrees of relationship. When, therefore, the following are observed:

• Ònìchà-Òwèrè	(roughly) 90%
• Ìka-Ònìchà, Ìka-Òwèrè	75-80%
• Èkpèyè-Ìka, Èkpèyè-Ònìchà, Èkpèyè-Òwèrè	65%

there is no choice but to posit *three different and incompatible* levels of connexion, the lowest of which is separate languages, the highest dialecthood and the intermediate something in between but with a separate name justified by the separate number. Thus we have the concept of the *language cluster*: Ìka is neither a language nor a dialect, we are told. To make this more concrete, Williamson suggests that such clusters exhibit either one-way intelligibility (a condition deliberately obscured by the variation-proof lexical sampling method) or non-transitive dialect chains; the first of these encodes unequal social relationships without acknowledging the influence of social factors on linguistic measures, while the second appears just to

restate the truism that neighbours have more contact than spatially distant relatives (and hence more opportunity for borrowing from each other). This brings out the central anomaly of a method of resemblances seeking to measure differences, a score card of cognation losses which addresses itself to genetic relations but is largely the product of borrowing.

The instructiveness of lexicostatistics, when pushed to their logic's extreme of refinement (which Williamson's publications on the subject surely represent), lies in the mediation of binary oppositions like language-dialect through the accretion of mediating terms like language cluster. Unfortunately, such new formulas remain aprioristic: do language clusters exist? Alternatively, hoping to interpret social relations rather than reductively encoding them in a specialist discourse of abstract quantity, I propose that speechforms bearing the mutual qualities just mentioned are related to each other as centre to periphery, and periphery to centre. These terms are primarily spatial; without insisting on a unitary speech community among all the connected and disconnected social networks found in any real locality, they capture the tension of differences mutually defined and united in a single area. We will therefore proceed to speak of 'central and peripheral speechforms in the Igboid language area', as opposed to the more single-minded terms 'Igbo dialects' or 'Lower-Niger languages'.

As to 'Igboid', while not euphonious it comes with a suffix of distinguished ancestry (Yoruboid, Èdoid, Idòmoid, Èkoid) indicating *approximate* identity with the root Ìgbò: thus it means, 'those speech-forms proximate to an Ìgbò centre'. 'Lower Niger' has failed in almost a decade to gain the acceptance of most scholars from its area, and the split of theory and practice threatens to become so wide that the ordinary Ìgbò language teacher sees the term as symptomatic of a whole field of impracticalities (viz. linguistics, which decries 'grammar books' yet seeks to write them, speaks of languages but sees only dialects, and other fine seeming-paradoxes); the unmixed label of 'Igbo' over all is hardening into resentful usage in consequence. Finally, by simple parity if speechforms with the same (Yorùbá-Igala) or considerably lower (Èdo-Okpe) mutual cognation are designated by terms (Yoruboid, Èdoid) still bearing the name of their 'first among equals' as the stem, then a shallower set cannot be denied such a concrete and motivated sign of identity in favor of a studiously neutral name of a riverbed.

In the remaining sections of this paper I will try to give substance to my statement that centre-periphery is a terminology of full extra-linguistic associations, by showing that these associations are in fact the *right* ones to describe what has resulted from the practices of missionary and colonial linguistics (sec. 2).

the military and political balance between Benin Kingdom and the River Niger from the first dynasty until the end of the first republic (sec. 3), the classroom system (again as used for catechism and colonialism - sec. 4), the relationship of oral performing artist and audience (sec. 5), and state and multiple linguistic 'nations' within it (sec. 6).

2. *The heritage of applied linguistics in the Igboid language area.* More competent hands have already begun to write the history of various attempts at standardization, orthography (codification) and instruction, although as yet with insufficient attention to the political economy of knowledge in the interests of missionary sectarianism (recounted by Ekechi 1971) and 'government anthropology' (examined by Owusu, Onoge etc). We are now asking the further question of how this externally directed activity impacted on the polycentric Igboid area to yield today's schizoid affirmation by modern-day prescriptivists that Ìgbò has a centre although no one can seem to find it precisely (the 80 miles between Ònīchā and Òwèrè is rather a wide bull's eye which guarantees the success of almost every search). No need to question if the effects are still with us, given the failure to nationalize the school system out of religious hands (this despite its generous expansion with public funds, liberal buy-outs of mission proprietors in 1977 etc): received prejudices remain enshrined.

But before deploring things further, I owe to the dedicated and professional language teachers of the colleges (Ọgbàlụ, Emēnanjọ...) the recognition that there is nothing impractical in having widespread knowledge of a Standard Igbo, the *moreso* for peripheral groups like the Īka. In the years following independence record numbers of Agbòr traders, for example, were active on both sides of the Niger; today the reverse movement is more apparent, with especially Imo State people regularly attending Īka markets, bringing clothing and leaving with foodstuffs. What is consequent in this context is not the mere existence of knowledge of some widely used Ìgbò variety: I am questioning the *form* of that knowledge, and the *interests* correspondingly motivating that form. Even without a definition of 'mother tongue' or of 'language of the immediate community' (which seem to be opposed concepts in the new federal education policy), it is not hard to see how early emphasis on an Igbo standard in primary school has been *reductive* - geared toward comprehension not creation of texts- and *substitutive* - seeking the widest possible domain for a 'universal' catechism and administration at minimum investment cost (see Ake 1981: 37f.). No provision was made for the east-of-Niger and Āsabā teachers to learn the tongue of their students in Agbòr of the '50's and '60's; rather they depended on Church Ibo and English as their link to the community, as well as the vehicle of their own

conversion.

But reduction and substitution do not necessarily coincide. The paradoxical result: several enterprising churches all pursuing the elusive *koinè* for their testament (in Ward's ironic 1941 analogy) failed to agree on one dialect basis in their geopolitical fragmentation, Catholics at their Asabà beachhead, Methodists and Presbyterians through the southeast (Ìmùhàhìà and Calabar) etc. Their image of the heartland as 'Satan's citadel' and the reservoir of raw souls gave appeal to a standard based on centrality; in this they were right for the wrong reason (as the spread of Ìgbò culture is said by Ònwuejiegwu 1970 to have followed a radial population expansion). But consider that the orientation towards the centre, of 'Central Igbo' (with a capital C), has not brought about greater realism of representing it: as earlier, the 'esperanto' orientation has prevented an adequate number of consonants from being admitted into the orthography. Not that the 'standard product' of Central Igbo's architects has not become increasingly intelligible, having bypassed the pure nominalism of Adams' polyglot lexicon, to Ward's phonological sensitivity² and recognition of dialectal sound correspondences as affecting possible choices among variants, reaching the thoroughly open minded descriptivism of Emēnanjọ (1977). Today's standard is the vehicle for a considerable amount of broadcasting and educational publication, and a small but growing creative literature (although the amount of writing in 'pure' dialects published in such media as òkíkà is on the same order of magnitude). There is general agreement on the need to utilize dialectal synonyms as stylistic variants, and as the raw material for coinage (recognizing that some morphological processes are more regular in the periphery). My argument, and I believe that of artists like Àchèbè, is not against standardization as such but against the consequences of neglecting the parallel development of dialects as primary media of creation. For the consequences of unilateral concentration on 'the' centre include an alienation of the periphery which works against the eventual adoption of the standard as even the secondary literate standard.

Ìka stands as a kind of limiting case, in the matter of localism, along with parts of the Igboid Rivers periphery, in being also externally oriented towards a centre of a different culture area/speech community *sensu lato*. I envision the emergence of today's seemingly ironclad ethnic boundaries as the product of subsequent layers of centre-periphery dynamics at, perhaps, the same initial time depth as the differentiation of the Benue-Kwa linguistic stock (and, as Nnòlì and others have stressed, reified subsequently under the impact of racism and imperialism). For now we can only observe the psycho- and sociolinguistic *distance* between Ìka and Central, contradictorily superimposed on extant relationships of language (both inherited and

borrowed relations), movements of history and textual traditions in oral literature, all forming an underlying sociohistorical dynamic which is presupposed in the practice of speakers. To concentrate on bilingualism as a supposed feature of 'ethnic borderlands', as is becoming fashionable, is to miss the problem by failing to see how indeterminate the concept of border itself can be. Far from simply enumerating differences (grammatical as well as lexical) between Ìka and its neighbours, our method is to totalize a situation of similarities and differences, in a multicentric pattern. Emēnanjọ's (1975) objections to the assumption that communication fails to take place across isoglosses, are entirely convincing. I would like to go further and assert that differences rather than similarities are the primary icons of social relations (this is the essential contribution of Labov's 1973 studies of linguistic variability). I conclude from this that development of peripheral speech forms need not be feared by language teachers as an obstacle to the acquisition of the standard - indeed just as mother-tongue primary school facilitates a later-acquired command of Standard English (as opposed to a creole), 'dialect' education would undoubtedly enhance the role of the standard by narrowing it. Negating Ìka literacy has effected the closure of education to the life-world and increased the communicative distance between local and supralectal forms. While the expression 'bilingualism' is undoubtedly too strong to describe the dyad of (spoken) Ìka/(written) Central Igbo, the jargonistic 'diglossia' is by itself unspecific (for it applies equally well to the far less problematic relationship between Enu- and Motor Park-Ònìchà, the lects of the Inland Town and the trading mecca respectively) and static. What is notable in the relationship is the inevitable rise of the periphery, once defined just by a Centre, to become a centre of itself.

3. *Ìka and its neighbours: relations of language, history and oral literature.* A reading of festival myths (Ìduwè *ms.*) reveals that Ìka sees itself as the historical link between Benin and the Niger, and the direct founder of the political ideologies of the riverine city states studied by Nzimiro (1972). Numerous preserved evening tales purport to describe state and society in pre-dynastic Benin, the period of the charismatic Ògìsòs. The Ìka self image is clearly not provincial. While the language of the people is described as "Agbòr" in reference to their capital, the geographical expression Ìka (from àlì *hun* *kā* *nin*³ 'the greater territory') is more democratically embracing. Like other incipient states of the pre-mercantile era, Agbòr was not encircled by a formal border but by concentric rings of towns in which its influence proceeded with diminished significance; Ìduwè tendentially calls these "Agbòr towns outside the Ìka fold": Ìgbankī (which became Ìgbankè with the 1946 IPA-based 'New Orthography' for Ìgbò, and has resisted respelling under the present or-

thographic regime the better to maintain the symbolic distance from Agbòr which grew during the colonial administration), Ota, Olijie/Oligie (the latter an Èdo-ism), Ogan. Ekpen, Obfor and Egbudu-Akan. The first four of these have Èdo as a principal language, especially among the older inhabitants (a fact hastily adduced in proof of various 'migration' theories with a two-generational model of history); the others are adjacent to that part of the Igboïd periphery identified as Ẹkwuàlĩ (Kwale). Immediately behind the old side of Agbòr, called Agbòr-Òbí after its 'first citizen', there is a circle of settlements one of which has an isolated and unique NW Èdoïd language as its undisputed mother tongue, although it is in other respects no exception to Agbòr political life, economy etc. The range of influence of the Ìka tongue is greater still, and extends at least to Abudu in the western direction (15 miles).

In the symbolic language of ritual, Agbòr both *has* and *is* an origin, like water:

Ènyi hĩ Ìduũ bíà, Òrògòdo!

'[god of the river] Òrògòdo, we have come from Benin' (ÈGÈDI DANCE LYRIC)

Nnà m Ògàle, oye tē bu Ẹzò bíà ibẹka nīn, owū iyi dọkwoma, Dgĩ mē nin oru!
'My master Ògàle, first to come here, if the stream floods, dry up the
tide that washes the banks' (A PRAYER)

The relationship to Benin is evoked often to prove an Èdo substratum in Agbòr, a popular theory that 'explains' a degree of lexical borrowing which is more consistent with long and steady contact on an Igboïd substratum.

There are a number of points of Ìka-Èdo linguistic resemblance which they share as common archaisms to the exclusion of more eastern groups, and fall into the category of shared retentions of putative Benue-Kwa morphology since they are not restricted to these two language groups. They include the prefixed non-punctual imperative e.g. *eie ē* '(be) look(ing) at it' (cf. Èdo *aghē ē* in the same meaning; other Igboïd forms would be *iēghe yā*, *iēme yā* etc.); the low tone 'subject concord marker' (Amayo 1975) which surfaces as a low-toned subject pronoun in *ē fun* 'it pains', cf. Èdo *ē de* 'she buys', and as a downstep before the verb stem as in *gi emīken ugo* 'yam is fat on the farm' (tonally paralleled in Èdo) - in more central Igboïd varieties surfaces only on the subject, as in the Ònicha-ism *chī ma* '(one's) *chī* knows', but has no recoverable effect on the verb stem, which is always low-toned in this construction in other lects except Ezinihite and Izii. Another prefix shared with Èdo is the Ìka (and to a lesser extent Ònìchà) noun classifier as in *òkpòho/ìkpòho* 'woman/women', cf. Èdo *òvbi/ìvbi* 'child/children'. The high (imv.) and low (indicative) verbal prefixes function as serious barriers to intelligibility of Ìka by more central Ìgbò speakers, for whom they symbolize negation. So striking

is the contrast between Ìka *ē bíà* / *ē bíà nīn* and the more central *ē bíàrà* / *ē bíàghĩ* 'she came/she did not come', that the indicative mood appears to be tonally upside-down in the other system.

Some phonological 'troughs' separating Ìka from its eastern neighbours and uniting it with Èdo (at least phon-aesthetically) include syllabic nasalization (i.e. a nasal feature associated autosegmentally with both a vowel and its preceding consonant, historically from the proto-structure *CNV < *CVNV - cf. Williamson *mimeo a*); deletion of a mora of vocalic length in word-boundary assimilations (i.e. the contraction phase of segmental elision, cf. DLNL 1972); a nine-vowel system; word-final falling tones. The mora deletion interacts with pitch adjustment rules to produce a greater degree of overlapping between underlying high and low tones, yielding a system more like the quasi-accentual downstep of Èdo. These facts make loans from Èdoïd languages less recognizable than those from Ẹkwuàlĩ. It is quite likely that much of the shared lexica and grammar of Èdo and Ìka is retained archaism. Some Èdo loans such as *òbù* 'doctor' must date back to the time when Èdo still preserved the high back constricted pharynx vowel. Even the Ìka name for Benin City, *Ìduũ*, corresponds not to the current name for it (which is simply *Èdo*), but to the word for a street, quarter or settlement: *Ìduũ* = Èdo *Ìdumwũ*, while a more recent borrowing *Ìdũmũ* 'quarter' corresponds more closely in both meaning and form to the Èdo source's present shape. *Ìduũ* is a very old word.

We may speculate that innovations in Igboïd lects to the east were resisted more firmly in Agbòr than in most West-Niger areas, in great part due to the presence of an archaic and largely similar neighbour to the west and south-west. Loans from other Igboïd groups (chiefly Ẹkwuàlĩ) remain stylistically or socially marked because their old Ìka counterparts are still present: *òtumyēn*, *okēyēn* 'stranger, man' reveal an old personal suffix seen also in Èkpēyē *nye* = *uduke* 'man' (Clark 1976: 189) = Ìgbò *nwokē*. Pairs of synonyms such as Ìka *akpohĩ*, Ìgbò *àbàlĩ* 'night' are likely marked [+NATIVE] given that the first is analyzable as 'a darkening'. The stative verb *rĩ*, Ìgbò *dĩ*, Èdo *re* has lost its locative meaning in many varieties of Ìgbò, or requires suppletion with the 'preposition' (serial verb) *na/nò*, but in the other two does not: Ìka *q rĩ oĩò*, Èdo *ē rē rē wā* 'It is not at home', vs. Ìgbò *ò dīrò n' Ẹnò*. Ìka has another locative as well, *hun*, which together with *rĩ* forms an opposition of nearer deixis or durativity vs. farther deixis or punctuality: *hun* is incapable of negation because of its component of psychological saliency to the speaker (including spatial distance), accounting for the following:

Ò hun emē 'he is doing'

Ò hun èbuan 'he is there (I saw it)'

Q rĩ eme 'he is not doing'

Q rĩ èbuan 'he is not there'

Q rĩ èbuan 'he is/was
(doubtless) there'

Comparison of verbal morphology (AUX + Prefix + Base + Suffix) is beginning to show the numerous systems which are possible within even closely related speechforms. Yet enough striking similarities remain that the innovations should be evident on internal grounds; we are not dealing with an unstable part of grammar, but with a highly concatenated one where comparison is essential to analysis. The emerging picture is consistent with a process of *gradual, mutual divergence, negatively influenced by the typology and ultimately genetic resemblance of neighbouring languages in 'filtering out' innovations which disturb archaic similarities*. It is as if dialectal variation is more tolerably systematic than superficial disharmony among less closely related speechforms. The influences of neighbouring languages on a language area derive, therefore, from initial inherited similarity and its communicative value, in the face of radical innovations from the center, allowing the peripheral communities to attain a more even-handed, bi-directional (although not equivalent) affinity.

Such interlinguistic influences can be observed in their fossilized effects, both structural, textual and political-economic. We have briefly outlined some types of structural influence to which Ika is exposed by the proximity of Èdo. It must be stressed that such influence cannot be observed directly, because it is not a self-propelled process. Rather by structural influence we refer to evidence of a linguistic boundary whose capacity for transmitting loans is unequal in the two directions. Ika, for example, preserves an Èdoism in the name *ḡmasiḡ* 'It-is-very-good', a collocation which is not in everyday speech, instead being known from its usage at Igbankē as *ḡ masi (ka)*. The Agbòr norm is *ḡ maka/ḡ hun nmā*, while in Èdo it is *ḡ yāse/ḡ ma(se)*. The fact is that all the morphemes in the above are present in one Igboïd variety or another as well: (Igbòḡuzḡ) *ḡ sīkà*, (Èhugbòḡ) *ḡ mākà*; *ḡ dī nmā*, *ḡ mā nmā*. Nevertheless what is presumably a common inheritance of Proto-Benue-Kwa has become skewed to the point that *si/se* and *masi/mase* are stronger to the west of Agbòr. This becomes the formal equivalent of a lexical loan, in terms of its perceivable directionality. The identification of these directions is facilitated by the linguistic forms, which have thereby ceased to be indexes of wide relationships and become icons of near ones.

For iconicity to operate, however, it requires more than the existence of code identifications. The other two dimensions, textual and civil complete the process by which intelligible indices, deployed in meaningful and stereotypic contexts, come to iconicize social relations. The thing which confronts the collector of Ika oral literature is how textual fragments and entire texts in Ukwāḡlī, Ika and Èdo are combined according to the correspondence of codes to social roles. There is no limit to the diverse types of social text which have been observed in practice, as soon as this sort of communication is recognized to occur. I limit my examples to

three intentionally diverse instances of textual iconicity of Èdo and Igbò in Ika public performances, i.e. verbal art in a ritual context (in 1977 at the Kaduna conference on language in education I described this as *textual heterofunctionality*).

- Ukwāḡlī interlarding of an age grade initiation play (Ālī-Irēn);
- Èdo chorus in reported speech from herbalist initiation (Īdūmū-Ukwu); and
- Ika version of the Kimē (Igbò Ezē Chīmā) expulsion, ḡsī-Èzi ritual (Agbòr).

The three show a formal progression from minimal to maximal length of text focalized, depending on the type of icon being constructed. The level of mutual intelligibility of the fused codes has a lot to do with the degree of formal fusion achieved and the manipulability of the icons by the performers: the first is partly improvised, the second invoked, the third merely commemorated. 'Kwale'-isms are easily manipulated because, as stated before, they are focalized through structural differences: they 'sound like Kwale', especially in tonality. Èdo songs are widely known in Ika, but with a more passive knowledge that permits repetition not manipulation (excepting those ritual specialists who gain fluency as their role sharpens in performance); thus the code-switching of the second type is pre-determined, an esoteric icon of the traditional doctor's wide recognition and orientation which does not vary situationally. The third is not linguistically heterogeneous at all, but in content it focalizes both the Èdo and Igbò boundaries, bridging them in different ways which precisely show the contrast in 'permeability' or subjective directionality which we pointed out with respect to loanwords. In all, we have a virtual catalogue of the ways that linguistic structure, oral literature and socio-historical consciousness are unified in portraying areal relationships.

ḡkorḡ Nḡ, first performed in the 1920's by an age grade of Ālī-Irēn quarter, Ālī-Isīmīān, was recreated for me by the *ezē egwū* (artistic director) Èbu Èdion, partly out of the realization that fewer and fewer alumni of the dance were alive - the lead dancer had died recently. Among the tasks which the age grade performed was a journey to Ukwāḡlī territory on portage duty for the colonialists, and although the experience was arduous it made the youths conscious of their community in a new light. The text contains some of the most remarkable interlarding which I am aware of in the sociolinguistic literature. As the product of a journey, the selection of dialect forms comes to represent its progression, with the words of supernatural beings - the animals who were surprised in the forest by a hunter - being the most highly marked by code-fusion. The hunter's going and returning symbolizes the historical journey of the youths, and his return with the secret of dancing conveys their inspired performance. But, although the animals taught the hunter how to dance, his attempt to teach the same to his fellow townspeople met with sarcastic and invidious

rebuff. In a bad imitation of the animals' gracefully lilting duple metre, the people use two beats over three to lampoon each other with nicknames (just as the fellow age-grade members dubbed each other in mock-gravity), and their lexis is much closer to straight *Ìka*. Underlined syntagms below are those which are indubitably not *Ìka* and were identified by the listeners at the re-creation of the play (in March and June of 1977) as "Kwale-isms" even though formally they are representative of a wide range of Igboid speechforms.

I: *the antelopes, dancing in a circle, sing to Òkoro the hunter.*

Òkorò nwa madù iyu mèrè nwe/mè nin nwè, 4
 Ọnwụ aà gbu ñgbàdàn ebe o dī na ògbò...

Mortal youth, you did it to yourself, death does not kill antelopes when they are in a circle...

II: *the townspeople rudely imitate the dance which Okoro brings back instead of game for the stewpot, and he joins them in good-hearted satire mixed with gnomic reverence for his safe arrival in his birthplace.*

Yo yo, e e e, Ọwānijēn e, Ẹjegūḡe m̄ o, Ẹlāmā m̄ ịjārē...

"Ò gī ọkụ àchọ ñgbà la wā yen ikēn" o,
 "Owanijen ẹri ọkọkọ ndun",

Ẹjen wē, "Asa-egedī" bụ nwa "Ishī-mā" o,

"Ò-ti-ñpụ" wūn nwa "Àgụ-mejā" e, Ọ wūn "Egedī-Ọdēlè", àchọ m̄ "Ò-ti-ñpụ" o,

Ezē egwū Ẹri Ọgēdē Ọgēdē ka, Ẹri Ọgēdē ka, Ẹri Ọgēdē ka, egwu Òkorò mē,

Ọbīārū-ijē Ẹnwe Ụla e...

Yo yo, e e e, the traveller, I have gone, I have started back to return, "He-uses-leg-to-chase-spouse-cohabits-them-gives-power", "The-traveller-eats-raw-snails", they went, "Asa-the-codger" is the child of "The-head-knows", "He-beats-at-random" is the child of "Agumeja", he is "The-old-vulture", I want "He-beats-at-random", the director of the dance eats many plantains, he eats plantains to excess...the dance Okoro made, a traveller has a return...

The satire continues for many verses, as the performers become inspired about each other. As a result of the restaging of *Òkorò Mē*, some of the nicknames were revived among the now very aged age-mates. It was a very solidary experience for them, but unfortunately could not be performed in more than fragments (instrumentation is discussed in section 5 below). Everyone acknowledged the creative talent of Ẹbu, his expertise on the trumpet, and the sacrifice entailed in the original journey, which brought back so much worldliness to the village, as expressed in the chorus:

Ẹsị m̄ jọ sia yā, elu oyibo kā nmā...

I said go tell him, the world of the whites is very nice...

Most surprising to me was the pleasure taken in 'mixing' the non-*Ìka* phrases into the performance: some of the main singers did it more than others. In so doing, they were symbolically crossing and recrossing the terrain which they heroically passed through in their youth, and which showed them diagrammatically their situation.

"*kẹ m bīdon dibiē*", the story of how the late Ọjọbū (in Ẹdo, Ọgi-Ọbo, titular head of the diviners) of Agbōr, was first initiated:

Ọ rī ifon Ẹto Ẹnwa nīn ahuā Ẹsā, ñgbā wẹ nọ gbu "Uredī". Ya kẹ Ẹnyi Ẹbụ
 abụ-ẹbū: "Ọvbi ọbo ghẹ lè ogbōi re, ghẹ lè ogbōi re
"Ọjọbụ mwān ghẹ lè ogbōi re"

It was three months and seven years from the time they killed [Commissioner Crewe-Read at Orogodo]. So we sang this song: "A diviner's son, may he not reincarnate as a novice, my [dear] Ọjọbụ, may he not reincarnate as a novice..."

The title he bears is a phonologically modified borrowing from the Ẹdo, where it analyzes, and the song sung at his initiation is entirely in Ẹdo except for the very title, which he gives in its *Ìka* form as a concession, perhaps, to his listeners who do not understand the other language; alternatively, it may actually be sung that way in Agbōr. Either way, the song as a whole is a ritual text which iconizes the Benin-Agbōr relationship, in which all herbalists in the former Benin Kingdom were styled as local leaders and given a wide authority in their sphere. I am not, however, convinced by this fact that *Ìka* divination is 'derivative' of Ẹdo; as in the case of structural relationships among the speechforms, I suspect that the similarity between the two cultures' systems of medicine is inherited from great antiquity. As Ọnwueje-ogwu (1978) has shown, *Ìgbò* divination called *Afa* is remarkable both for its similarity to the Yorubá *ṣá* and for its specifically *Ìgbò* features. We would not be wrong to posit an oracular tradition of Proto-Benue-Kwa date to account for the shared features which could not possibly be borrowed without betraying more specific traits in common (the Yorubá *babaláwo* reads his *ajé*, *ikin* or *òpèlè* as a unit, while the *Ìgbò* *dibiā* takes them in two parts from right to left, and uses a syntax to link the two symbols into one complex sign, etc). And the *Ìka* diviner, like his Ẹdo colleague, maintains an oracular medicine bundle which he interrogates:

Dibiē aà jen nmō, Igbāgbā Ẹjen.
 Ọbo iyō Ẹrimwīn, Ẹwāwā Ọyo.⁵

The oraclist does not go to the spirits, it is the medicine bundle that goes.

The Great Ọsị-Ẹzi and the flight of Prince Kimē (adapted from a chapter of Iduwe ms.)

Adigwe succeeded Ogwade his father as Eze Agbor at the end of the 17th Century. Before the installation, Kime the son of Osee's senior daughter had hoped to become heir, as succession was not strictly to any one person (primogeniture). Adigwe's mother was contemptuously beaten in the farm when she went to pluck ujuju leaves for soup, and died the next day. Kime was charged with sending his servant Ebu to flog her, but Adigwe and the people of Ali-Isimien revolted on pretext that their daughter's son Kime was cheated. They attacked the palace and the senate house, removing the ofo Ali-Ogbe-Nmu-Dein. Ogbe-Nmu-Dein pursued him as far as Akumazi when he escaped and took refuge at Obior. During the Ichu Nmor ceremony, Orinze Ojefa sacrifices to the ancestral spirits in appeasement for the abomination committed by the prince, so that they can leave the festival

scene by midnight of Eken day. On Orie is Ngba-Ogbe, when the youths gather in Ogbe-Uku to wrestle, marking the end of the festival. The Iwa-Gi festival of Ifejioku begins on the following Afor day.

Drawn from the oral tradition, the written history from which the above is extracted is one of the major efforts in non-academic historiography, standing beside Egharevba's work (which was its inspiration) in depth and classic stylism. Onwuejeogwu was the first to point out the significance of the Kimē episode for evaluating the so-called Ezē Chimā Migration said to have launched the political existence of the West Igbo kingdoms including Ònīchā. *Kimē* is a purely Ika name which is a short form of *Kimēkuzi*? 'What-am-I-to-say-again?'. The difference between that and *Chimā* 'One's personal god knows' is partly an isogloss of palatalization (seen in the doublets *eki/echi*, *qgi/qji* 'tomorrow, kola' etc.) and partly an unexplained reanalysis of meaning which is not, however, uncommon in borrowing names and seeking some transparent analysis when the etymological one is impossibly obscure to the speakers of the borrowing language. This story is clearly about how Agbōr royal lineage (Ōgbē Nmū Dein) asserts its innocence of the theft of its *Ẹfọ* by one of its members, and establishes Agbōr's claim to greater antiquity as a royal state than the Igbo towns of the Niger district (who claim that Chimā belonged to the Benin dynasty of Izodūwā). While no linguistic forms of Ẹdo or Igbo are to be found in the *Ichū-Nmō* ritual itself, the prior episodes of the *Ọsi-Ẹzi* contain much Ẹdo in the establishment of Agbōr's own claim to legitimacy as a dynasty externally renewed; and the Ifejiokū cult is of Nri-Igbo origin. The Kimē text therefore stands symbolically between Benin and the East, a political dimension of Ika's far-reaching relationships.

The foregoing three samples have shown how Ika texts are full of explicit or, in the final case, implicit code-switching (heterofunctionality) with respect to the areal relationships of its history. They underline the argument of this paper, a long paraphrase of Marx and Engels' concise statement in *The German Ideology* that "Language is real, practical consciousness." We turn to examine the kind of consciousness to be found in the schools.

4. *Breaking the 'theme of silence' in education.* The overall argument of this paper now turns on the socialization of literacy. We cannot ignore the control, by agents of imperialism and missionary ideologies, of the educational system; for the same policies of suppression of local culture which obtained in early linguistics were active in the schools, and at the same two parallel levels: domination of Nigerian by foreign thought, and domination of local by administrative-regional authority. The teacher-student relation, itself paternalistic in Western society, and analyzed by Friere (1970) as a narrative dyad of subject-object, thus invites comparison also

with Hegel's master-servant relation as recounted by Fanon. Both are recalled in Illich's (1980) formulation on the repression of mother tongues: *vernacularization*. Both contrast with the discourse situation of oral literature, in that they are specifically insensitive to the expression of historical relationships and realities. How else would so many Ika, literate in English and Igbo, come to claim that Ika is not a potential written language because "there are not enough letters in the Igbo alphabet to do it"? This sort of syllogistic doublethink, typical of teachers over their depth and of preachers worldwide, recalls Habermas' (1979) analysis of social domination as being reproduced through systematically distorted communication, and a confusion between claims to truth and to legitimacy, a reduction of illocutionary to propositional force, an apologia that 'things are because they are meant to be'. How else to explain the practice, still frequent, of firing schoolchildren for using their mother tongues in school (evidently linguistic intolerance is not a monopoly of apartheid).⁶ In Friere's description, the absence of the subjective linguistic experience turns education into a 'culture of silence'.

In this regard, it is worth asking what, if any, effect the intervention of the federal government can be expected to have in the area of national language policy for education. Will the decree, and implementation, that languages of the immediate community or mother tongues be the media of instruction for lower or all of primary school suffice to transform the student into a subject of communication and remove paternalistic barriers to creative activity? Evidently not; a culture cast into disgrace cannot be revalued by decree, nor can the 'cultural sedimentations' (in Fanon's words) of the precapitalist era suffice for the culture of a marginalized and increasingly dependent peasantry and landless labour force. Allowing for the different atmosphere of Algerian liberation struggles, we can still observe the lack of a contemporary national culture apart from that associated with the fetishism of commodities. I am riveted by Fanon's image of the traditional verbal artists during the liberation struggle, who although they had become

stéréotypés et fatigants à écouter, bouleversent de fond en comble et leur méthodes d'exposés et le contenu de leurs récits. Le public, autrefois clairsemé, se fait compact. L'épopée, avec ses catégories de typification, reparait (1959: 169-70).

He reports how, between their reappearance in 1952-3 and 1955, these popular media were "systematically arrested", their new genre of literature having flourished in less than three years. It may appear futile, after this history lesson, to turn to cataloguing the oral tradition, but it is still from the available skills and stocks of verbal art that a new movement must come. Unlike the missionaries, we cannot look for sky-sent inspirations, but to the concrete situation.

5. *Oral texts and literate Ika: the view from below.* Of the three texts cited in section 3 above, the one by Īduwē is typical of the process by which an oral culture finds written expression: a prestigious member of the society, after extended initiation in the culture of the colonizer (in his case as a railroad clerk and mission school catechist) turns back to become a 'literate traditional scholar', i.e. keeps for some overriding personal reason a hold on traditional knowledge and gives it expression in English. Many such manuscripts exist in all corners of Nigeria, Īduwē's being of unusual quality due to the qualities of the man: grandson of the great herbalist Ōsāhon (the Ōjōbū of his day) and Olotu of the royal lineage of Agbōr, well traveled yet intensely patriotic, unafraid to criticize. His achievement is a vast synthesis of the oral histories of the entire Agbōr Kingdom, most especially of the palace itself. To most of the national elites with their 'colo-mentality', such second-hand works will be the only contact with these traditions, and nothing can stop his book from becoming a classic work on the same level as that of the late Chief Egharevba.

It would be unworthy, however, if appreciation of his achievement should obscure the limitations of this model of 'literization' of the oral sources. As Bradbury (1959) pointed out for the *Short History of Benin*, an author who stands so closely in his tradition, yet comes to stand for it by his education and advancement, can produce a document which closes the field on itself. Apart from comparative and archaeological evidence, says Bradbury, there is no possible critique of the conclusions of Egharevba since his sources all read the book, most of them died, and those who remain accept the 'superiority' of what they read (over what they themselves told him) as of all other manifestations of the inscribed Word. As 'Wāñdē Abímbólá and Chụnṣà Àchēbē, first among others, have stressed, the continuity of the tradition requires first of all the reproduction of the traditions themselves - in the words of their custodians, the professional poets. For as Àchēbē pointed out, these people cannot come forward and contribute their 'stock-in-trade' to a system of literacy which negates their very existence by prescribing a single form of a language for writing purposes. Our argument converges with his on this point, and we both agree that the first step should be to locate the verbal artists and present their texts to a public trained to read it.

Following Ōlātúnjì (1975) we must admit that there is no royal road to knowing what are the genres of oral culture, which we must know if we are to find the practicing artists, each with her or his genre to preserve and recreate. We can separate poetry from prose on the criterion of a musical (i.e. rhythmic) accompaniment: the controversy in Yorùbá studies over the metrical structure of its poetry could have

avoided reifying the texts apart from their musical frames). Some subtypes of prose contain poetic choruses which invite audience participation as well as carry the more emotional message which is not stated too blandly. Īka *inu* carry rich social history and do not neglect the relationships mentioned earlier in the paper as between different peoples as different kinds of speakers. In a study in progress, Ōnwẹjeogwu and I propose that the era of the 'Ōgīsos', the fabled pre-dynastic rulers of Benin, represents a social order which was more widespread than the Èdo area, and that the special concentration on Benin followed the emergence of later, expansionist Benin power under which the deceptively simple stories of royal deception, cruelty and oppression became focalized. *Iten* 'proverbs' and historical narratives round out the prose category.

Poetry is classifiable by the instrument which sings, or accompanies the singing voice. The mouth-bow ònẹ́ carries royal praise poetry, just as the ọ́dẹ mark during time of festival. The ẹ́gẹ́dī double snakeskin drum accompanies the oracle priests in their acrobatic displays, and the covens of the witches (ògbòmẹ́). Şẹkẹrẹ and ẹ́gogo follow the processions of the Olokūn cult. Many times the same specialists in prose are the musicians who sing the demanding lead vocals, but as among genres there is likely to be variation among the performer. New singers are constantly finding their way to radio stations and one of these, a paraplegic from Īgbankẹ nicknamed Nshì-Efí 'Cow-shit' for his acerbic style of wit was known to innovate new types of instrument. What such people lack is necessary sponsorship to reach a worthy audience, but perhaps it is just as well, because if publicized they, like Fanon's conteurs, would likely find themselves behind bars. As yet they are the main hope of an Īka literacy capable of reversing the elitist model of written culture by composing orally for the dissemination of the media, collection and anthologization in the schools.

6. *Linguistic encapsulation or development of state-minorities?* The blindness of official linguistics in the colonized world to the areal situation and rich historical relations among speech communities is not unprecedented. When at various policy conferences I have attended the question is posed by some bureaucrat of 'what to do' about the minorities, it is difficult to forget echoes of what Hymes (1970, 1973) calls 'neo-Herderism', the philosophy of the 17th-18th century absolutist states dressed in new 'scientific' garb. As Anderson (1974) recounts, the modern nation-state arose through the gradual and violent encapsulation of Europe's 'tribal' peoples who had existed in the open spaces between the ill-defined borders of mediaeval society. Old Herderism gave rise in turn to Romantic assumptions of a span of devel-

opment extending between the polar types of tradition ('folkish culture') and modernity (later glorified in Weber's dialectic of rationalization). The modern state thus arose by "historicizing a territory and territorializing a history" (Poulantzas 1978: 114). These ideologies, come the age of imperialism, took off the burden of England's own cultural repression by legitimating cultural oppression in 'primitive' lands, where Victorian aristocrats projected their own guilt at their idle lives as the accusation of 'native indolence' which was corrected with a dose of profitable forced labour. In leaving the legacy of a national state in Nigeria, the British extended the social ontology of their own past to recreate 'tribalism' by administrative fiat (Nnoli 1980).

In this historical context, the imposition of linguistic standards amounts to a kind of national hygiene, taken up assiduously from missionaries by nationalist functionaries, who burst upon scientific conferences with the pressing demand of 'how to get rid of all those minority languages - any advice?'. To dismiss this sort of thing as the understandable excesses of a nonspecialist is most dangerous, given the lack of independent support for linguistics in this country outside of some foreign churches and the government-owned universities. The Summer Institute of Linguistics alone produces an output of research equal to that published by the departments of linguistics, and has proven difficult to control given its private nature. Only recently have some state governments, notably Rivers and Oyo, taken steps to ensure that their interests in language development were not skimmed over at higher levels.

The capitalist state has its own interest in linguistics, the construction of a national language, which

is reducible neither to the problem of its social and political usage, nor to the State's positing of linguistic norms and regulations, nor to the consequent destruction of dominated languages within the nation-State. The very structure of the national language is profoundly reorganized by the state: the relationship of language to the capitalist spatial and temporal matrices is restructured insofar as it is cast in the mould of a State which crystallizes intellectual labour in its specifically capitalist separation from manual labour. Thus, the role of a common language in constituting the modern nation does not refer to a process whereby the State takes over a language, causing it to suffer purely instrumental distress; it denoted the very re-creation of language by the State. (Poulantzas 1978:115)

The originally romantic equation of language and culture becomes, in the modern state, an inversion in which the once encircling 'tribal' peoples of the world become encroached upon, encircled and finally encapsulated⁷ in ethnic centres within civil society. The dangers of this logic of incorporation, becoming self-directed separatism, for a social formation like Nigeria are too well known. During the Civil War, Ika was the periphery of the Biafran periphery, where Obi Ikenchuku (installed

19 December 1968) kept a precarious balance between warring forces; in Iduwa's tribute, "Ikenchuku could be called a saviour, both of his people and of the strangers within his gate" (ms.: 49). The present movement for creation of Anioṃa State (Okoh and Onwuejiegwu 1981) recalls an alliance formed in both colonial and civil wars, and proposes an autocentric development for the area from Agbör to Asabā. If this succeeds in transforming the Anioṃa speechforms into vehicles for Freirean subjectivity in schools and offices, markets and motorparks, then the question of "Ika: language or dialect?" will have been resolved by being overcome.

Footnotes

1. The first occasion for this paper was my participation in the 1977 Federal Ministry of Education conference on Language in Education, for which opportunity I have always been most grateful to the National Language Centre. A more adequate attempt at dealing with issues of this complexity was made at the 15th West African Languages Congress, University of Port Harcourt in April 1982. My research in Agbör was first proposed by Prof. M. A. Onwuejiegwu and supported by my many Ika-speaking fathers and mothers; I salute you all: *Onye kũ ihye wẹ mē nin, ya sị wẹ mezi nīn qzq.*

2. Unfortunately marred by a social blindness which allowed her to end her landmark 1941 treatise on phonological variation with a hypothetical dialogue between "D.O." and "C." on the virtues of paying taxes and the veiled consequences of failure to do so - this a decade or less after the *agha nde nwanjị*, a massive Aba-centred women's rebellion against the warrant "C." system and its corrupt and unjust taxation.

3. In this paper high toned syllables are unmarked, as are redundant vowel-harmony marks such as the first vowel in the word *ika*. In the example, the high toned morphemes *hun* and *nin* are, respectively, the relative particle and the resumptive relative *anaphor*. Among the redundancies of Ika syllable structure is the rule that any nasalized syllabic is automatically constricted pharynx.

4. This phrase constantly alternated in performance between these variants, which are Kwale and Ika respectively. It is a poetic motif which comes up most often:

I ēme nwā 'you do yourself' (in herbalists' songs)

ị amārin nwā emē nwā 'you don 't know what the child will make of itself'

(proverb)

Note the four consecutive downsteps on the last example.

5. Many thanks to Chief Priest Ọsemwegiè Ẹbòhon for his help with these examples.

6. The recent resurgence of this practice in some states may have less to do with neocolonial oppression than with a crisis of personal finances shared by all unpaid teachers.

7. The term was originally used in this sense in Prof. Otite's *Autonomy and Dependence*.

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- Appendix: map.

