

# The Linguistic Characteristic of Esan language: Towards its Empowerment and Development. By:

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## PRELIMINARY REMARKS

First I must thank the Association of Esan Professionals (AEP) based in Lagos, for inviting me to be the Guest Speaker and for putting together this workshop which some of us deem long overdue, given the urgency of the matter at hand. Esan language, like many small group languages, is in dire straits and has been crying for the attention of its owners. A few Esan people had paid attention in the past and have done a lot but more needs to be done if the language is to be salvaged from certain death. It is a question of time and time is running out. Once again, I thank the AEP for organising this workshop as it is better late than not.

The organisers of this workshop had asked me to speak on 'The Linguistic Characteristic of Esan language: Prospects for its standardization'. As you can see, the topic has been changed to 'The Linguistic Characteristic of Esan language: Towards its Empowerment and Development'. The change in topic and focus was necessitated by the fact that Esan language has already been standardized through the approved orthography published in 1987

and the topic chosen captures the next natural step in the scheme of the process of language planning. In what follows, we provide some background information on Esan, especially on the process that led to its standardization, before delving into our main topic.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term ESAN refers to the people and their language. They were referred to as 'Ishan' by the British. Presently, the Esan people are found in Edo State, Nigeria, occupying the area covered by five Local Government Areas (LGAs), namely Esan West, Esan Central, Esan North-East, Esan South-East and Igueben. The area of land is 2987.52 sq km and is bounded on the north by Etsako LGA, on the east by the River Niger, on the south by Oshimili, Aniocha and Ika LGAs and on the north and north-west by Owan and Orhionmwan LGAs. The northern half is a plateau with the highest point some 1,500ft above sea level (Okojie & Ejele 1987: 20).

In terms of population, the 1963 Census puts the population of Esan speakers at 270,903 in Esanland. However, this figure rises to 500,000 when neighbouring communities that still speak varieties of Esan are considered. These communities were part of Esan up to the 1930s before they were politically separated from the old Ishan Division. Now Erha, Ishiolili and Ozalla belong to Owan LGA while Ujiagbe, Idegun, Awain and Anegbete now belong to Etsako LGA. Figures from National Bureau of Statistics (in 2007) are as follows:-

Esan Central	105,310
Esan North- East	119,346
Esan South -East	167,721
Esan West	125,842
Igueben	69,639

This gives a total of 587, 858 which is expected to rise when Esan speakers living and working outside their LGAs , States and in the diaspora are considered.( Ejele 2007).

Historically, Esan people came from Benin, being descendants of fearless warriors and great farmers and are known to be very intelligent, industrious, proud, hardworking, firm and principled. Following the harshness experienced during Oba Ewuare's reign, many people fled to safer abode. Their name 'Esan' is derived from 'E sán fiá' meaning 'they have fled' (Okojie 1960: 30-37 for details). The Igueben people were the last to migrate from Benin and still speak a variety of Esan very close to Bini. Esan itself started out as a dialect of Bini but is today regarded as a separate language. It is the closest to the Bini language among neighbouring related Edoid languages of Owan and Etsako LGAs. The affinity remains till today as borne out in the common adage **Esaingbedo** meaning 'Esan does not beat/kill an Edo person'.

In terms of linguistic classification, Esan language is North-Central Edoid, belonging to the Edoid group of languages classified as Benue-kwa (Elugbe 1986), formally classified under the kwa subgroup of the Niger-Congo family (Greenberg 1963) and now classified as New Benue-Congo (Bendor-Samuel 1989). Thirty-five (35) clans make up the Esan language group, speaking varieties of Esan language, distributed as follows in the LGAs:-

#### **Esan West**

Ekpoma, Egoro, Idoia, Ogua, Ijiogba, Ukhun, Urohi

#### **Esan Central**

Irrua, Ewu, Opoji, Ugbegun

#### **Esan North-East**

Uromi, Uzea, Urho

#### **Esan South-East**

Ubijaja, Emu, Ewatto, Ewohimi, Ewossa, Ifeku, Illushi, Iyenlen, Onogholo, Oria, Ohordua, Orowa, Ugboha, Okhuesan.

## **Igueben**

Igueben, Ebelle, Ekpon, Amahor, Okalo, Ugun, Udo

Except for Ekpon, a border clan that is bilingual in Ika and Esan, it is easy to recognise a speaker from each of these varieties of Esan, as the different varieties are mutually intelligible, such that successful communication between speakers is not affected. Indeed such differences, mostly lexical and sometimes tonal, are not enough to blur mutual intelligibility (Ejele 1982, Okojie & Ejele 1987).

It is essential to give this background to remind ourselves of where we are coming from, the stuff of our ancestry, so that we can properly chart where we want to go or what we want to do with our language – to salvage it or watch it go into extinction. The choice is ours to make.

## **Interlude – First Song**

2.0 STANDARDIZATION OF ESAN LANGUAGE  
Esan language has been standardized since 1987, following the publication of **Esan Orthography**, along with four other languages, sponsored by National Language Centre, Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos in ORTHOGRAPHIES OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES MANUAL V, edited by (the then) Dr. R.N Agheyisi. The prime objective of publishing manuals in series for standardizing Nigerian languages has been ‘to provide up-dated information and systematic guidelines for writing in these languages’ (Agheyisi 1987:i). Furthermore, it is hoped that the publication of these orthographies will serve to renew efforts and generate greater interest in the development of the languages in the written form (Agheyisi 1987:ii). Many more orthographies sponsored by National Language Centre have since been written. National Language Centre has been absorbed into National Educational, Research and Development Council (NERDC) in Abuja. It produced the last two sets of manuals

– NERDC ORTHOGRAPHIES OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES MANUALS IX and X, in 2011, edited by Professor Ozo-Mekuri Ndimele and was sponsored by Rivers State Government. The two volumes contain seven Rivers State languages each.

Given that there is no dominant variety in Esan language community, the fact that the different varieties are highly mutually intelligible means that variations are readily accommodated within the common frame of reference presented in the approved orthography.

## 2.1 Early works on Esan language

Although Esan Orthography written by Okojie & Ejele was published in 1987, it must be pointed out that work on the language started long before this time. Esan was first written by the Catholic Mission in its **Esan Catechism** around 1930 and improved upon in 1969. The teaching of Esan was introduced in government schools in 1932. The Anglican Mission followed the Catholic Mission but taught in Yoruba language. Other Missions such as the Apostolic and the Assemblies of God, contributed their bit to translating the New Testament.

In addition to these institutions, a number of Esan people worked on the Esan language and we need to recognize them. Thus Emmanuel Ughulu did some pioneering work in his **Esan Primers** in 1951 and **Esan and English Translation** in 1960, the publications of **Ebe Esan 1&2** by the 1952 Esan Language Committee Chairman, Chief L.J.O. Oyakhilome and members, the 1983 Esan Language Committee chaired by Mr F.F Eboigbe with Secretary as Engr. E.A Otaigbe and the 1986 Esan Orthography Committee chaired by Dr C.G Okojie with Mr (now Dr.) C.E Ighalo as Secretary. These are all acknowledged and listed in the references of **Esan Orthography**(1987).

How the 1986 Esan Orthography Committee came about is interesting. Working independently, Mrs Ejele, then a Masters student of University College in London, had in 1982, written her M.A Thesis **TOWARDS A PHONOLOGY OF ESAN**. The work established the sound system of Esan, the letters of the Esan alphabet and some phonological processes that were common in the language. Sometime in 1984/85, she received a letter from the Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos to, as a Linguist, provide an orthography for Esan. She sent a copy of her M.A thesis to the Ministry, with a list of some notable Esan people, asking them to present it to Esan people to agree or disagree with the data and her analysis. Consequent on this, they were invited to Lagos to deliberate on the thesis, at the end of which they confirmed the data and analysis. In 1986, Mrs Ejele completed her Ph.D Dissertation **TRANSITIVITY, TENSE AND ASPECT IN ESAN**, returned to Nigeria and worked on developing an Orthography for Esan with Dr. Okojie (as a representative of the Esan Orthography Committee). The 1987 Esan Orthography was based mainly on Ejele 1982, which the Committee had ratified.

## 2.2 Highlights of Esan Orthography (1987)

As a way of recapitulating, in this section, we provide a summary of the highlights of the approved Esan Orthography listed as bullet points.

- Esan has thirty-two letters of the alphabet made up of twenty-five consonants and seven vowels.
- Esan has five nasal vowels spelt as- in, ɛn, an, ɔn, un- which contrast with their oral counterparts i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u . Thus Esan does not normally have /e,o/ as nasal vowels.
- The five nasal vowels are not reflected in the alphabet; instead nasality in vowels is captured by the spelling rule v+n, meaning a vowel followed by the letter n which represents nasality. Eg. tin cf ti

- Nasal vowels followed by oral vowels within a word are spelt with the n after both vowels.eg iziengbe cf izinegbe.
- Esan has two nasal consonants /m/ and /n/-bilabial and alveolar respectively, but three nasal phones; the third, the voiced palatal nasal [ɲ] is in complementary distribution with the voiced palatal approximant /j/ [j] eg. yẹ cf yẹn.
- Most of the digraphs earlier in use were dropped, only bh, ch, gb, gh, kh, kp and sh remain as seen in the Alphabet.
- All vowels are spelt with a following letter n after the nasal consonant /m/.
- Long vowels contrast with short vowels in Esan eg. yẹn ‘cook’ cf yẹn ‘to press’
- Words are spelt in full form, irrespective of how they are pronounced, so no more use of hyphen to represent elisions. This takes care of word boundary modification involving elision.eg. gbe uzo cf gbuzo
- Esan has three level tones and two kinetic tones. Since it would be cumbersome to represent all five tones, and to improve the efficiency of Esan writing system, it was approved that words be tone-marked where its absence would lead to ambiguity.
- Otherwise, only the high tone should be tone marked.

### 2.3 ESAN ALPHABET

<b>Letter</b>	<b>Phoneme</b>	<b>Spelling</b>	<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>Translation</b>
a	/a/ as in	aba	[abá]	‘father’
b	/b/ ,, ,,	bela	[belá]	‘what?’
bh	/β/ ,, ,,	ẹbhe	[´εβe]	‘goat’

ch	/tʃ/	„ „	chiere	[tʃieré]	‘return’
d	/d/	„ „	ada	[ada]	‘witches coven’
e	/e/	„ „	eto	[éto]	‘hair’
ẹ	/ɛ/	„ „	ẹdẹ	[´ɛdɛ]	‘river’
f	/f/	„ „	afe	[áfe]	‘urine’
g	/g/	„ „	aga	[agá]	‘chair’
gb	/gb/	„ „	ọgba	[´ogba]	‘fence’
gh	/ɣ/	„ „	ughegbe	[uɣegbe]	‘mirror’
h	/h/	„ „	ọha	[´oha]	‘catarrh’
i	/i/	„ „	ihẹ	[íhɛ]	‘load’
j	/dʒ/	„ „	oje	[ódʒɛ]	‘laughter’
k	/k/	„ „	ọka	[´oka]	‘corn’
kh	/x/	„ „	okhuo	[óxúo]	‘woman’
kp	/kp/	„ „	okpia	[okpiá]	‘man’
l	/l/	„ „	ẹlo	[ɛlo]	‘eye’
m	/m/	„ „	ọmọn	[´omɔ~]	‘child’
n	/n/	„ „	unu	[únu]	‘mouth’
o	/o/	„ „	ododo	[ódodó]	‘flower’
ọ	/ɔ/	„ „	ọta	[´ota]	‘talk’ (Noun)
p	/p/	„ „	ọpia	[opja]	‘cutlass’
r	/r/	„ „	ọria	[´oria]	‘person’
s	/s/	„ „	esi	[esi]	‘pig’
sh	/ʃ/	„ „	ọshọ	[´oʃo]	‘friend’



t	/ t /	„	„	tan	[tã]	‘tall’
u	/ u /	„	„	utun	[ˈutũ]	‘mushroom’
v	/ v /	„	„	uvin	[uvĩ]	‘coconut’
w	/ w /	„	„	awa	[áwa]	‘dog’
y	/ j /	„	„	oyi	[óji]	‘thief’
z	/ z /	„	„	ze	[zε]	‘choose’

Esan has twenty-five(25) consonants and seven(7) vowels.

Following the publication of the standardized writing system in 1987, the approved Esan orthography was formerly launched on Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1990 at Irrua Town Hall, in a ceremony organized by the Esan Orthography Committee, attended by government officials, traditional rulers and other distinguished sons and daughters of Esanland.

This was followed up on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1991 with a One-day Workshop with the purpose of giving an intensive educative and enlightenment programme while encouraging the active participation of primary school teachers as well as writers/authors writing Esan stories, primers and books in the Esan language. I was the Guest Speaker and the point was made that their presence in that workshop was crucial to the success of operating the Esan Orthography as the onus was on them to practicalize what was proposed in the document, otherwise we would all have laboured in vain. The interaction was very successful.

### Interlude – Second song

#### 2.4 Post- Esan Orthography

It is usual to have a workshop or a series of workshops as a follow-up to the introduction of an approved orthography. It was hoped that the workshop would lead to a better understanding and

teaching of the Esan language. It was also expected that at the end of that workshop, the benefit of having attended would be reflected in authors' subsequent writings as well as in the teaching and learning of the language such that with time, Esan language having been standardized, would be used by speakers of ALL the varieties of Esan and the language would become easy to be read or studied by any literate person, Esan and Non-Esan.

Unfortunately, with hindsight, we needed more than one workshop. Funding was a major issue and the Esan Orthography Committee had moved on to work on Esan Dictionary, a right step in the scheme of providing writing systems for languages. Although a few people such as Mr F.F Eboigbe wrote THE ESAN PREMIER FOR PRIMARY 1 (not dated), it is not clear how successful his and other such attempts were. What we expected was a flurry of activities such as would have encouraged more workshops. ESAN DICTIONARY, edited by Dr C.G Okojie was published in 2003. We lost Dr. Okojie in 2006 ( God rest his soul) and since then, there has been no rallying point and Esan Orthography Committee has gone into oblivion.

Here we are in 2016. It is indeed fortuitous that members of the Association of Esan Professionals (AEP) have come to the rescue and taken up the gauntlet. This is a laudable step of historical and linguistic significance for Esan people and Esan language as enunciated in the objectives mapped out for the workshop. Some of the objectives encapsulate the essence of the struggles of a few dedicated, patriotic Esan people who have struggled over the years, calling the attention of Esan people to the real possibility of their language going into extinction mainly because of failure of transgenerational transfer. The very step taken to hold this workshop will certainly go a long way in sensitizing Esan people about concerns on the decline in spoken Esan language among all sons and daughters of all ages, especially the younger generation, if enough publicity is given among Esan

people to the outcome of this workshop. We shall discuss this further but at this juncture, let us look into the steps we need to take in the process of empowering and developing Esan language.

### 3.0 EMPOWERING ESAN LANGUAGE FOR EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Salvaging Esan language from possible extinction is a worthy enterprise because Esan is an endangered language and the concern expressed by AEP is clear evidence of your awareness. The fact that many languages of the world are endangered is well established in the literature (Wurm 1995, Brezinger 1998). According to Wurm (1995), it has been predicted that by the end of the twenty-first century, some 90% of languages spoken now may disappear with the introduction of multimedia technologies of communication. However, Emenanjo (2005:6) observes that ‘even before and without the Internet, sociologists had come to the conclusion that only about 10% of today’s 6,528 languages of the world, spoken by 6.5 billion people would survive into the twenty-first century’.

The culture, history and tradition of a people are expressed in their language and Essien (1990:168) draws attention to the truism that ‘a community that neglects its language, neglects the quintessence of its humanity, not only as *homo sapiens* but also as *homo loquens*. A nation that does not recognize its linguistic character or fails to promote it, loses its mental and cultural heritage’. Languages spoken in the world are reflections of the traditions, thoughts and cultures of their people, all unique in their essence, and as observed by Montviloff (2002), ‘any loss of language is a disappearance of a pool of knowledge and an impoverishment of our cultural heritage and research capacities’. Indeed, a generation that fails to transmit its language to their children, or the next generation, has failed in its transgenerational duty.

Grimes (1992:343) describes Esan as ‘a regional important language used in initial primary education’ and observes that 99% of Esan people in Edo State speak or understand Nigerian Pidgin English. Can we say this same percentage speak Esan their own language? Of course, not. Now you see why I said Esan language is in dire straits.

There is need to salvage both oracy (spoken form) and literacy (written form). It is through literacy that we can write our literature and preserve our cultural heritage, folktales, folklores, idioms, oral tradition, proverbs, legends, peculiar expressions associated with rituals and stories that teach moral values as part of our cultural heritage.( Ejele 1999, 2003). Saving endangered languages involves arousing interest in speakers of the language to take pride in their language and desire to preserve it by getting the younger generation to use it (Bamgbose 2007: 4).

### Interlude – Third song

So, how do we salvage Esan language? What is the way forward? How do we empower the language in order to harness it for education and development? We don’t need to re-invent the wheel. In sociolinguistics, language planning or language engineering refers to a systematic attempt to solve the communication problems of a community by studying the various languages/dialects it uses and developing a realistic policy concerning their selection and use (Crystal 1997:214). In the literature, four complementary types of planning are useful in the empowerment and development of any human language for it to be truly useful for education and development. Three of these are linguistic and the fourth non-linguistic, namely, identity planning (non-linguistic), status, corpus and acquisition (linguistic) (Emenanjo 2004:175). Some of these planning requirements are not challenging in the case of Esan, unlike in some languages. Next we discuss the language planning types.

### 3.1 Identity Planning

Even though identity planning is a non-linguistic factor, it has serious implications for linguistic viability and survival. Esan people, though of a small population compared to other nationalities in Nigeria, 'have turned out to be a force to be reckoned with, playing critical leadership roles at critical times in the history of Nigeria, being blessed with bold and courageous leaders, even in modern times' (Ejele 2007:4). The geographical location is contiguous covering five LGAs, and so is clearly delineated. In fact, in today's political parlance, Esan is the Edo Central Senatorial District between Edo North and Edo South Senatorial Districts.

Culturally, the Esan people and language are distinct even within the Edoid group of people and languages as there are certain foods, dances, greetings and traits that are associated with them. Identity planning is strongly influenced by political and cultural considerations. Esan language is clearly delineated as distinct as fairly homogeneous, given that all the varieties are mutually intelligible. There are no issues with identity as the Esan language is easily identifiable among its closest relatives of Edo(Bini), Owan and Etsako in the Edoid group of languages. So Esan language and people are easily identifiable in terms of geographical location, linguistic characteristic, cultural traits, historical antecedents, political awareness and sagacity, psyche and otherwise. ( Ejele 2012, 2015).

The fly in the ointment is the danger of losing the language since parents themselves are not transmitting the language to their children who therefore do not speak the language; inter-ethnic marriage, urban movement, cosmopolitanism and the rising profile of Pidgin in Esanland are not helping matters. Esan people have to take interest and pride in their language and in 'Esan-ness'. A strong awareness of linguistic and cultural identities, backed by strong attitude of language loyalty, language maintenance and nationalistic

solidarity will enhance the empowerment and development of Esan language.

### 3.2 Status Planning

In terms of status in Nigeria, Esan is one of the numerous small group languages. Unlike the major and main languages, small group languages are either underdeveloped or undeveloped, spoken by a small population. Speakers of these languages communicate among themselves interlingually (as opposed to intralingually) either in Pidgin (and/or English if educated) or in another native language such as a major one eg. Yoruba or a main language. (Ejele 2003:120). The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1977 Revised in 1981, 1998, 2004) makes provision for the use of Mother Tongue (MT) as a medium of instruction in pre-primary (nursery) and in the first three years of primary education, Junior Secondary School (JSS), while it should be taught as a subject in all classes from pre-primary, JSS and Secondary School( SS) levels. Failure to teach any Nigerian language at the lower levels of nursery, pre-primary and JSS, is a sure path to language death (Ohiri-Aniche 2007:33). Better progress would have been made if the momentum had been sustained in implementing the use of and familiarity with the approved Esan orthography in the educational instruction in the nursery, primary and JSS educational system. The use of the language is limited to the home and the LGAs. This has implications.

Even though status planning is based on significant political and linguistic considerations, the onus of making the language viable and valuable lies squarely with the natives. It is hoped that this workshop will be the catalyst to draw attention to it once more. This step will facilitate the overall interests of acceptance, recognition, promotion and valorisation of the Esan language for its empowerment and use in education for the overall development of Esan as a whole. One sure way of valorisation of any language is intergenerational transfer. This means not only getting young people

to speak and write the language, it also means making available school texts including primers, readers and manuals both for people and teachers (Bamgbose 2007:4).

### 3.3 Corpus Planning

Corpus Planning is strictly linguistic as its focus is mainly the overall development of a language for literacy and numeracy in its widest ramifications. Sociolinguists have mapped out four processes that a language goes through for it to be said to have arrived at the optimum level of sociolinguistic readiness viz, Graphization, Standardization, Codification and Modernization.

The process of **graphization** has been successful since Esan already has an orthography, a writing system developed for literacy. This is the most important step in the process of reducing a language to writing. Esan is lucky that its varieties are largely mutually intelligible and so avoids challenges that are still plaguing some languages in the development of their language because 'an orthography controversy stifles the emergence of a robust, viable, popular and universally acceptable literary tradition' (Emenanjo 2004:179). Esan orthography is technically backed by Ejele's 1982 pioneering work on the phonology of Esan and her Ph.D Dissertation in 1986 on critical aspects of grammar which have become reference materials in descriptive linguistics.

The process of **standardization** which involves the selection, promotion and propagation of one variety of a language that becomes the written form is, again for Esan, not a challenge. However, we note that the written form using the standard orthography does not stop any native speaker from speaking (pronouncing) his own variety, especially for languages that have not developed a Received Pronunciation (Quirk 1986). Over time, the written form will influence the spoken form.

Having overcome the first two processes, the third process which is **codification** is the next in the development of Esan. According to Crystal (1997:67), the term refers to the compilation of a systematic statement of the rules and conventions governing the use of a language variety, typically the standard language of a community. For Emenanjo (2004:180), codification involves the systematic organization and documentation of the facts of a language as captured in books on spelling, grammar, dictionaries, encyclopaediae, counting/enumeration, metalanguage and style manuals. These documents serve as standard reference materials and act as guides to how to go about writing and also provides explanations for steps taken. They serve to facilitate language cultivation via determining and establishing correctness and acceptability. Codification is indeed very important because the whole process of organizing and documenting relies heavily on how good the orthography is. Hence, if the orthography is poorly done and is, for instance inconsistent, it will negatively affect whatever it is used for or based on it.

The last leg in the process of attaining sociolinguistic readiness is **modernization**. This involves how to extend the language to be able to cope with new realities of life arising from culture contacts, science & technology, information and communication, and globalization. Many of these have been done for the three major languages ( eg. provision of The Technical Terminology for Primary Science 1978, The Legislative Project and The Metalanguage Project) and we can borrow a leaf from what they did. As already stated, we don't need to re-invent the wheel.

### 3.4 Acquisition Planning

Acquisition Planning involves the use of language in education and language education itself. Once a standard orthography, written materials in terms of standard texts, reference, other written materials and standard and dynamic



metalinguage are available in the language and are being used by the native speakers, the language is said to be ready for acquisition planning. However, for acquisition planning to take place, there must be material development and capacity building.

**Material development** involves the provision of materials such as instructional materials and any other thing that will aid teaching and learning, especially in formal education. Whatever is introduced must be based on the curricula. Similarly, **Capacity building** involves having the right calibre of teachers in terms of their qualification and professional competences as well as enough numbers since effective teaching and learning cannot take place without these.

It is pertinent to point out that the situation on ground in the educational system right now in Esanland leaves much to be desired. There is acute shortage of teachers, even for other subjects and hardly any for Esan language. In fact, some schools have only one principal and one or no teacher. There is a dearth of teachers, so problems of recruitment, training and adequate number are serious challenges. In addition, students now prefer to study Home Economics instead of Esan language in JSS 3 Examination.

### Interlude – fourth song

#### 3.5 AEP's Collaboration and Partnership with the Research Centre for Esan Language and Values in SAUO

Now that the development and preservation of Esan language has caught the attention of AEP, it must be pointed out that it is a long process that requires political determination in terms of commitment to the promotion of Esan language not only in our homes but also in the school system. In the short term, we all must begin right away to consciously use our language to communicate with our children in our homes. This step will have

the effect of immediately arresting the slide to extinction, for if we don't use it, we will certainly lose it (Williamson 1990). For the medium term, we must support the promotion of teaching and learning Esan in the nursery, primary school and JSS. In the long term, the collaboration of AEP with the Research Centre in SAUO will be required in providing training facilities for teachers, designing curricula, providing standard texts and other teaching materials, in fact all activities connected with Corpus planning (eg. codification, modernization) and acquisition planning. The cooperation of Esan and non-Esan Linguists and language enthusiasts will facilitate a quick attainment of empowering Esan language for use in the educational system. The Research Centre can as soon as possible mount a Diploma Programme in Esan. AEP can sponsor Esan students who wish to make a career of it to encourage them to study Esan language in such a programme.

In addition to political commitment, this enterprise requires financial commitment as well. The objectives of AEP are achievable, with political and financial commitment and working in collaboration and partnership with SAUO. We have no doubt of the capability of AEP as we believe that where there is a will, there is a way. Other Esan organizations and people at home and abroad who care about Esan language are expected to key into this enterprise, with AEP setting the pace. All hands should be on deck.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

This enterprise of salvaging Esan language primarily involves the cooperation of all of us- Linguists, educationists, language teachers, language planners and language speakers. Native speakers have to be aware of their responsibility in rehabilitating and elevating the status of their language. If we don't value what is ours, who do we expect to? Rescuing Esan language calls for determination and commitment to the promotion of the language in the school system and financial commitment. For the school

system, the language planners, teachers and educationists have to play their role and for the financial commitment, the collaboration with Samuel Adegboyega University( SAUO) proposed by AEP is welcome. To bring things up to date, which is like the icing on the cake, AEP also plans to partner with SAUO to deploy ICT, online platforms in the teaching of Esan language across the world while focusing on Esanland, Benin, Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. We salute you and encourage other Esan organizations and people to key into this vision so we can all work together to save our language and as we do so, may God help us to achieve what we set out to achieve. Long Live Esan language, Long Live Edo State and Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

### Interlude – Fifth song

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