A Brief Survey of Mother Tongue Scripture Use Among the Ekajuk of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This report presents findings of field research on the use of Ekajuk [ISO 639-3 identifier eka] Scriptures, particularly the print version of the revised New Testament. However, we also asked questions based on audio Scriptures. Ekajuk is spoken in Cross River State of Nigeria. The work is the second part of a broader research project on factors that influence the extent of mother tongue Scripture use within Nigerian communities that have had Bible translation projects (the Izere Scripture Engagement Survey Report, 2014). The research methodology included individual interviews of forty-three Ekajuk speakers, interviews with twenty-four church leaders, participatory group interviews and observation of language use in church services. We visited mostly areas and churches where the Ekajuk Bible translation committee chair and other officials reported that the Bible is available and in use. So, we considered the areas and the churches as best cases, while other areas as worst cases and investigated all. Topics covered include domains of use of the Ekajuk New Testament, segments of the community that use it, and probing the reasons for its use or disuse and ways to change the state of disuse. We did not get a consistent picture of use of the Ekajuk New Testament, but its use seems to be fair in Winnimba, Nwang and Egbung. There are individuals who can read in Ekajuk, but the majority could probably easily learn to read if: they transferred their ability to read in English [eng], they have adequate teachers to teach them how to read in Ekajuk, they have sustainable literacy programmes, they have the New Testament available in every Ekajuk community, they develop interest in reading and writing in their mother tongue. Church leaders value the Ekajuk New Testament for best understanding, but most accept a de-facto policy of using English and Pidgin because almost “everyone understands the languages.” This report reveals virtual and critical issues that the communities themselves see as hindering and promoting the Ekajuk Scripture use and the ways the Ekajuk think they could take to foster use of the New Testament.
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1. Introduction

The purpose of the research was to collect valid and reliable data about use of the Ekajuk [ISO 639-3 identifier eka] Scriptures, particularly the two printed editions of New Testaments by Ekajuk speakers. Our primary aim was to find out what factors influence the extent of the Ekajuk Scripture use in the areas and churches which were reported to have people who use the translation. We worked with various individuals, church leaders, church groups and Ekajuk Bible translation committee chairman and a few members to identify which specific factors they see as preventing or promoting use of the Ekajuk Scriptures in the Ekajuk community. We also investigated ways by which the community thought it could embark on to change the state of disuse to a state of use of the Ekajuk Scriptures.

Figure 1 Map of the Ekajuk area, also showing some villages names of surrounding language groups. Yoder, Hannelova and Otronyi. 2008.

1.1. Fieldwork and villages visited

The fieldwork was carried out within six days, from 3rd - 8th November 2013, in Bansara, Ntara, Winnimba, Nwang, Mfom and Egbung villages. These villages were reported to have people who use the Ekajuk Scriptures more than people in any other villages. As such, we considered them as best cases to be investigated to determine the most likely general trend.
1.2. General research questions

In this field work we chose to use three questions out of the four questions that we intended to use in all three language communities (Izere, Ekajuk and Mumuye) that we proposed to survey. The choice of these three questions was informed by their seemingly genuine tendency to investigate real and practical issues in the Ekajuk Scripture use situation. The research questions are those questions we as researchers intended to answer. These guided the questions which we asked individuals in interviews, but are worded in a very different way.

- In what domains are mother tongue Scripture publications (including audio publications) used?
- What segments of the community are using mother tongue Scriptures?

Rather than investigating a single factor that prevents mother tongue Scripture use, we decided to find out what local leaders and community members believe are the reasons for use and non-use:

- What reasons are project leaders and community members aware of for use/disuse of the mother tongue Scriptures?

1.3. Ekajuk specific research questions

Based on our background research on the Ekajuk language and translation project, we chose the following additional research questions specific to the Ekajuk New Testament and the Ekajuk sociolinguistic situation.

- In what ways do church leaders value the Ekajuk Scriptures?
- Are the Ekajuk able to read in their language well enough to read the Ekajuk Scriptures?
- Do all Ekajuk speakers accept the standardized form as their own?
- Are copies of the Ekajuk NT adequately circulated in all the Ekajuk communities?

2. Background

2.1. Languages and dialects

Most Ekajuk speakers are multilingual, speaking not only Ekajuk but also Nigerian pidgin-English, a language of wider communication in the area. Also, many speak English [eng], especially those who have had formal education.
Table 1 Ekajuk dialects and villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect names</th>
<th>Villages visited in each dialect area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mfom</td>
<td>Mfom2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esham</td>
<td>Nwang, Ntara &amp; Winimba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekagongho</td>
<td>Bansara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebanimbim</td>
<td>Egbung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Brief history of the Ekajuk Bible translation and literacy projects

The Ekajuk New Testament was published in 1971 and was reportedly used throughout the Ekajuk area (Talsma, 1971). Dale Talsma reports that the New Testament needed work (primarily on the orthography), but was still usable (pers. comm, 2006). Talsma determined that an Old Testament translation would help people use Scriptures more, but there was not enough commitment from churches and leaders to translate the Old Testament. The reason was that the people expected the proposed Old Testament project to be fully funded by outside sources, just as was done for translating the New Testament. Dale thought the community needed to pay for at least one-quarter of the cost, but the community was not ready for that. He maintained that the New Testament was not fully used because it was not owned by the community. Lay readers from Lutheran church were the only ones who could fully make use of the New Testament, as Dale and others worked with them and used it in lessons, Bible studies, etc. The New Testament was reportedly not used in other denominations. Dales thinks that a lack of ownership of the New Testament by the Ekajuk community was the overall reason for the inadequate use. The Ekajuk New Testament was reportedly stored in two to three drums back in 1994 to prevent them from being damaged. It was later revised and 5,000 copies of the revised version were printed in 2012 (Talsma pers.com.2013).

A preliminary phonological statement for Ekajuk was produced in 1976 by Werner and Renate Kleiner). Talsma reports that Ekajuk literacy efforts were strongly resisted by the people. The resistance was thought to be motivated by the Ekajuk teachers who thought they needed a lot of training to be able to teach literacy in Ekajuk or the people did not have strong desires to learn to read and write in Ekajuk. They preferred to be literate in English to being literate in Ekajuk. Talsma reports that most people were just happy to have their language written in a book. Dale reports that if 10%-20% of the Ekajuk who are literate in English could learn to read in Ekajuk, people would have strong drives to internalize and use Ekajuk Scriptures. Creating an Ekajuk literature culture was considered unreasonable (pers. comm, 2006).

However, Rev. Wilfred Ebo reported that all copies of the revised version of the Ekajuk New Testament had been sold out to many churches in the area and many people can read in Ekajuk. He said that the community had an ongoing literacy programme but the attendance was not encouraging. He concluded that the Ekajuk ran out of story books in the vernacular which were produced by the Kleiners and lacked video and audio recordings in Ekajuk (Interview, 2008).
3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling of villages

In order to really evaluate use of the Ekajuk New Testament, we visited mostly villages that were reported by the translation chair to have copies of the Ekajuk translation and people are actually using them in various denominations in the area (see Table 1. We considered these villages our best cases, although we paid much more attention on Bansara because it is reputed as the place where translation and literacy activities started. Also, Bansara was the main town and the big trading centre of the Ekajuk and the home of the most senior chief of all the Ekajuk. Chief Philip Elgam Nakaku was located in Bansara (Kleiner, 1965, 66).

3.2. Participatory methods

Participatory methods help communities to reflect on issues that affect them, using visual aids in a creative way to ensure all present participate in the discussion. We used a single new participatory tool which combines elements of three tools:

- domains of language use in the church
- a modified version of the bilingualism tool (also known as the “overlapping circles” tool)
- appreciative inquiry to address use of Scriptures in the church

We used the Participatory methods at: Lutheran Church in Nwang, St. Theresa Parish in Nwang, St. Peter and Paul in Winnimba, Church of Christ in Winnimba, St. Dominic in Ntara-1, Assemblies of God in Ntara-2, Assemblies of God in Bansara, St. Joseph in Bansara, Catholic Church at Mfom-1, Church of Christ Mfom-2, Catholic Church in Egbung. We worked with groups including church members (including men, women and youth).

3.3. Church Leader interviews by researchers

We interviewed:

- **2 Rev. Fathers** at the Catholic churches in Nwang and Bansara
- **12 pastors** at Pentecostal Church of Nigeria Incorporated, Living Church of Christ, Church of Christ and Assemblies of God in Winnimba; Assemblies of God, Church of Church and Last Days Messengers Mission in Bansara; Deeper life and Lutheran Church in Nwang; Assemblies of God and Pentecostal Church of Nigeria Incorporated in Ntara-2; Ultimate God Assemblies and Devine Shower of Praise Ministry in Egbung.
- **3 Deacons** at Assemblies of God in Egbung, Pentecostal Church of Nigeria in Nwang and RCCG in Mfom-2
- **3 Catechists** at RCCG, Pentecostal Church of Nigeria and Assemblies of God in Nwang, Mfom-2 and Egbung;
- **1 Sunday school secretary** at Assemblies of God in Mfom-2,
- **1 Station leader** at Catholic church in Ntara-2.
- **1 Minister** at Church of Christ in Mfom-2
- **2 Church elders** at Ntara-1
3.4. Observation by researchers

We attended Sunday morning worship services and mass, noting which languages were used in various domains and any comments or behaviours which revealed attitudes towards the use of different languages in the church. We chose to observe first before interviewing leaders, individuals and groups in order to reduce any chances of possible bias. We carried out the exercise only in churches that were reported to use the Ekajuk New Testament in various domains. These were the Catholic churches in Bansara, Nwang, Ntara 1 and 2 and Winnimba; Assemblies of God Church in Bansara and Winnimba; Living Church of Christ in Winnimba.

3.5. Individual interviews

We interviewed individuals so we would be able to get the views of individuals on use of the Ekajuk New Testament and to determine individual attitudes towards the translation and the reasons they use or do not use it.

3.6. Sampling of individuals to interview

We used convenience or accidental sample methods in the various churches that we visited. We chose to interview individuals who were available and ready to be interviewed based on the purpose of the survey. They comprised of men, women and young people in the various villages and churches. The table below is a breakdown of the sample:

*Table 2: Sampling of Individuals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Church/denomination</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bansara</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnimba</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ntara</td>
<td>Catholic/Pentecostal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nwang</td>
<td>Catholic, Lutheran</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mfom2</td>
<td>Catholic, Assemblies of God and Church of Christ</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egbung</td>
<td>Catholic/Assemblies of God</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Domains of Ekajuk Scripture use

Are Ekajuk Scriptures used? As we consider the results, we ask two questions: *where* and *how* they are used (this section) and *who* uses them (section 5).

Our results are based primarily on reports of individuals and pastors from interviews. Throughout this section we emphasize that the information is reported.

We asked about the following domains and media:

a. Reading Ekajuk Scriptures in private

b. Reading Ekajuk Scriptures in the church
c. Hearing Ekajuk Scriptures read aloud anywhere
d. Hearing audio recordings of the Ekajuk Scriptures anywhere
e. Singing songs or hymns based on Ekajuk Scriptures
f. Memorizing Ekajuk Scriptures

In the individual interviews, the respondents (51%) mentioned that they use Ekajuk Scriptures in private for devotion. They reported to also use the English Bible. The church leaders we interviewed (75%) also reported to know people who use the Ekajuk Scriptures in their private studies. Also, when asked where they hear the Ekajuk Scriptures being read aloud, the individuals (98%) reported to hear the Scripture read aloud mostly in their churches and homes. And church leaders (75%) also agreed that the Scriptures are read in churches and in the various homes of individuals in the area.

The church leaders (83%) reported that many people in the community own and listen to audio recording of songs and sing songs and hymns which are based on the Ekajuk Scriptures. And our respondents for individual interviews (93%) reported that people in the community sing songs based on the Ekajuk Scriptures mainly in the church (mostly on Sunday) and in their homes. We also tried to find out if people memorize the Ekajuk Scriptures and the church leaders (70%) and other individuals (53%) agreed to know people who memorize the Ekajuk Scriptures.

4.1. Domains for spiritual growth

We asked both individuals and church leaders about three most important activities they do in their various churches which help people grow spiritually and the languages they use for the activities. Most individuals (81%) mentioned prayer and Bible studies as the top domains and the church leaders (63%) also see Bible studies as the foremost domain. The next activities that were also mentioned as being most important for spiritual growth are sermons and prayer and fasting.

The participatory group discussion also indicate that prayer, Bible reading/studies and singing related activities are considered paramount for spiritual growth of the people. These activities are reported to be done mostly in English and Pidgin before Ekajuk. English and Ekajuk Scriptures are reportedly used for these activities.

5. Segments of the community who use the Ekajuk Scriptures

It seems likely, based on the individual interviews and participatory discussion results, that the younger people use the Ekajuk Scriptures more than the middle-aged and older people. This may be as a result of the higher English literacy level of young people over the older ones.

However, not even the youths reported to read Ekajuk in two of the groups. The Assemblies of God groups in Ntara 2 and Bansara reported not to use Ekajuk New Testament because they do not use it in their churches and it is not available in their communities. Yet,
they mentioned that they know a few old and middle-aged people who have copies of the Ekajuk New Testament and use them in their homes.

6. Community reasons for use and non-use of Ekajuk Scriptures

6.1. Reasons from community members that Ekajuk Scriptures are being used

When we asked the people to give reasons why the segments above use the Ekajuk New Testament, many individuals (77%) and majority of the church leaders (71%) said that people use it because it makes them understand God’s words with much ease. They also said that people use the translation because it is written in the language that best appeal to their hearts and people believe that it quenches their spiritual thirst. Similarly, all groups that we engaged in participatory discussions agreed that people use the Ekajuk Bible mainly for ease of understanding, spiritual growth and identifying with the language.

Also, the Ekajuk Bible translation project leaders reported during interviews that people use the Ekajuk Bible because of understanding the Scriptures well and it is available in some villages (eg in Winnimba, Ekpogrinya and Nwang). Three Ekajuk primers (primers 1, 2 and 3) were reported to be used by literacy teachers for teaching beginners. Project leaders also said they mobilize people for literacy classes and advise them to use the Ekajuk Scriptures.

6.2. Reasons from community members that Ekajuk Scriptures are not being adequately used

In order to strike a balance, we also asked why some people in the community do not use the Ekajuk New Testament. Of those who were interviewed, individuals (70%) and Church leaders (46%\(^1\)) reported that such people cannot read. They added that the people do not have adequate teachers to teach them reading and writing in Ekajuk and the supply of copies of the New Testament is inadequate. They also commented that a few individuals in the community seem uninterested about reading and writing in Ekajuk. The groups for participatory discussions also mentioned the above reasons as the factors prohibiting the adequate use of the Ekajuk New Testament.

Also, the project leaders mention the following as more contributing factors: people’s poor responses to literacy classes, ignorance of the importance of studying in one’s mother tongue and people’s attitude of not wanting to purchase copies of the Bible (people feel it should be distributed for free or sell at lower rate). The leaders reported further that they do not have adequate financial support from churches and individuals in the community to print more copies of the New Testament in order to make it available in every village. They concluded that Ekajuk is not studied as a subject in schools. They feel that this situation make reading in Ekajuk difficult to people who are already used to reading in English.

\(^1\) Some (54%) did not respond because they were either newly transferred to Church or not Ekajuk speaking Church leaders
6.3. Community reported ways to enhance use of the Ekajuk Scriptures

After identifying the reasons that prohibit the use of the Ekajuk New Testament, we then asked the people to suggest the best ways to embark on to enhance adequate use. They mentioned the following as the best ways to take:

- Classrooms should be made available where people could be taught how to read and write in Ekajuk
- Train teachers as much as possible who could teach people reading and writing Ekajuk
- Produce more copies of the Ekajuk New Testament to go round all communities of Ekajuk speaking people.
- Motivate people who are not interested in reading and writing in Ekajuk to become interested
- Create more awareness about Ekajuk Bible translation activities
- The copies of the Bible should be sold at affordable rates

7. Church leadership’s values

Another specific factor we investigated was the church leadership’s values. We made effort to determine what extent church leaders’ value mother tongue Scriptures.

7.1. Church policy concerning language use

All churches in the area use English as the main language for all activities, Ekajuk and Pidgin are also used but secondary to English. The church leaders interviewed (58%) attributed the situation to either a policy or a common practice in their separate churches. The remaining leaders (42%) reported not to have any policy or practice concerning language use in church. They said they conduct church services in English and songs are sung in various languages.

7.2. Church leaders’ verbal support of mother tongue Scriptures

The church leaders (75%) reported to give verbal support for Mother tongue Scriptures before their separate congregations, however, a few (25%) felt they were not in the best position to declare such support. They reasoned that they were new in the area and not even speakers of the mother tongue.

7.3. Church leaders’ practical use of the Ekajuk Scriptures

A majority (58%) of all church leaders interviwed reported to use Ekajuk in their churches. Nearly all of these church leaders were Ekajuk, though we did not observe adequate use of the New Testament by church leaders during Sunday worship. The others (42%) are not Ekajuk native speakers and do not read in Ekajuk.
7.4. Challenges for preaching in Ekajuk

Only a few church leaders (20%) reported not to have any problems whatsoever in preaching in Ekajuk, and all of these were native of Ekajuk. The remaining of church leaders who responded to this question (both Ekajuk and non-Ekajuk) (38%) clearly said they do not preach in the mother tongue because they have people in their congregation who are not native speakers of the local language.

7.5. Ethnic composition of the churches

Most church leaders (88%) said that the Ekajuk ethnic group constitutes 80-100% in each of their congregations. The remaining leaders (12%) reported an Ekajuk population of 50-60%. This clearly indicates that Ekajuk native speakers are the majority in almost all church congregations in the area and should adequately use the vernacular Scriptures during sermons and other activities, although the presence of other language groups, even clergymen and women does not allow that.

8. Literacy

With adequate background knowledge that the Ekajuk now have the revised version of the New Testament, we decided to ask them if they are able to read it or other Scriptures that are written after it.

8.1. Ability to read the Ekajuk New Testament

Going by responses from individuals and church leaders we interviewed, the majority of Ekajuk speakers could be said to be able to read and write well in Ekajuk. Many individuals (67%) reported to proficiently read in Ekajuk (these people read well and fully) and others (28%) said they partially read in the local language. Only one individual reported to read poorly. The respondents reported to be also aware of other individuals, mostly males who are literate in the language.

8.2. Observation of the people’s ability to read the Ekajuk New Testament by researchers

During the individual interviews, we asked our respondents if they would be able to read the Ekajuk New Testament or not. We gave a copy to those who answered “yes” to read and most respondents were able to read it. Only a few seemed to have difficulty in reading.


After determining their ability to read and write in their language, we also tried to find out if all Ekajuk speakers in all communities considered the standardized Ekajuk New Testament as their own.
9.1. Perceived ownership of the Ekajuk Bible translation

We found out that almost all church leaders and individuals seem to have strong positive attitudes towards the Ekajuk translation. They feel that it is owned by all Ekajuk people because it is written in their language. This indicates that the people accept the Ekajuk New Testament as their own.

10. Availability of the Ekajuk New Testament

The New Testament is reported to be widely known to most people in the Ekajuk community, but not available in some villages. While some church leaders reported to know where to purchase copies of the New Testament, others say they do not. In fact, many individual (33% of those interviewed) reported that non-availability or scarcity of the New Testament is responsible for its non-use by many Ekajuk speakers.

11. Conclusion

The Ekajuk New Testament is used in several sub-domains in church and home domains mostly by young people in a few villages. Many middle-aged and a few old people are also said to use it. Most of these people are members of the various Catholic churches in the area. These groups of people use the Ekajuk New Testament because it is written in their own language, which they understand better than any other. This better understanding of God’s words quenches their spiritual hunger. However, there are native speakers who do not use the Ekajuk New Testament because they cannot read in any language, can read in languages of wider communication but have not learnt to read in the local language, do not have teachers who would teach them how to read in Ekajuk, or do not have adequate supply of copies of the New Testament in their areas. Some can read in Ekajuk but they are just not interested in reading in Ekajuk. This is primarily as a result of the influence of English as the language of school, church, government, economic, even some homes. Though, in some areas, no one reads in Ekajuk because they do not have copy of the Scriptures.

12. Recommendations

The recommendations are drawn from our general assessment of the general situation and look out of the people interviewed on the best ways to take in order to promote use of the Ekajuk NT among the Ekajuk native speakers. The following are the recommendations:

- The Ekajuk Bible Translation Committee, church leaders and opinion leaders in the community who are interested in having all Ekajuk people read Scriptures in their mother tongue, may work together on intensive mobilization of people in various churches and villages for considering the benefit of reading God’s words in Ekajuk.

- The translation committee may work with community and church leaders to organize or re-organize literacy programmes for people of various age categories. These programmes could be set up under the direction of existing schools or churches or newly created organizations.
Potential teachers or facilitators should be identified and trained by translation committee in collaboration with the community and Church leaders.

The translation committee should ensure that copies of the Bible are adequate in circulation in all villages of the Ekajuk and people should be able to know the points of purchase without any difficulties.

Copies of the New Testament that people can afford should be produced. Also, smaller more affordable Scripture booklets could be published, for example selected books of the Bible with Bible study questions.

Audio Scriptures should be adequately produced so that it could reach many people, particularly those who are not literate in any language (Faith Comes by Hearing and audio recordings of Scriptures could be sold at low prices in churches other places in the area). Listening groups (audio Bible studies) could be set up in partnership between the churches, the translation committee, and Language Development Facilitators.

**Bibliography**


